

“Set Free!”

“Looking for trouble.” I assume most of us are familiar with that phrase. Right? Now, there are several and very different ways that phrase might be expressed. For example, a person might be “looking for trouble” to obtain attention or praise. In such a situation, the person “looking for trouble” might publicly say or do the outrageous – speak words or carry out actions, which are politically incorrect – to draw attention to his or her self. When a child is angry and wants to rebel, he or she “looks for trouble” by throwing toys or screaming or calling the other person names or slamming doors or hitting or even biting. If the child or even an adult is larger or more powerful than the person at whom the anger is aimed, then society correctly calls him or her a bully.

A very different example of someone “looking for trouble” is found in the Lectionary Gospel Reading for today. However, the person “looking for trouble” was not doing it to get attention or praise for himself. Instead, Jesus was looking for opportunities to demonstrate God’s Agape Self-

Giving and Sacrificial Love for all people! The specific situation reported in our Scripture enabled Jesus to reveal God's Agape Love in two ways at the same time. One of those two ways was of great benefit for a woman, who had been suffering greatly for eighteen years. The other way God's Agape Love was demonstrated benefitted everyone – including you and me!

Our Reading describes the woman as being filled with “an evil spirit”, which not only “kept her sick for eighteen years” but which also physically made her bend over – unable to “straighten up at all”! Many “evil spirit” situations in New Testament healing stories would probably be understood to be a form of mental illness today, however, she could have also experienced a major back injury or had a bone disease or a genetic malformation. Given her condition, she was most likely avoided by everyone. On top of her disease, she was a Jewish woman during Biblical times – so no unrelated Jewish man would have even spoken to her. Further, having “an evil spirit” meant everyone viewed her

condition to be the result of God's punishment for her being evil. So, the very folks, who should have been a loving and supportive religious community for her, denigrated and demeaned her.

Now, let's turn for a moment to consider how something about that event provided Jesus an opportunity to set free – to benefit you and me. The aspect of this setting, which Jesus addressed for our welfare, has to do with the day of the week it was. It was the Sabbath, sometime between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday. Jewish Society, under the strong encouragement or demands of the legalists – the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law, expected any good Jew to follow the Commandment to remember the Sabbath and to keep it Holy. They understood keeping it Holy included doing no work. Yet, there were all sorts of exceptions to that flat out prohibition against doing work on the Sabbath, according to the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law. Most of the permitted excuses for not fulfilling the Sabbath Law against work, had to do with

benefiting one's self by saving one's property from spoiling or being harmed.

With all of that background, let's examine how and why Jesus was "looking for trouble" in our Scripture. Luke told us in verses 10-11 that the sick woman was present in the synagogue as Jesus taught. **In verse 12 we are told, "When Jesus saw her, he called out to her, 'Woman, you are free from your sickness!'"** It is interesting that the Greek word used for the word "free" is the same word which was later used to refer to "freeing" or untying livestock for watering. **In verse 13, Jesus did something frowned upon – against the legalists rules, "He placed his hands on her, and at once she straightened herself up and praised God."** A good Jew, much less a Teacher, was to not touch any unrelated woman, especially not one with "an evil spirit"! So, Jesus talked to the sick woman, declared her "free" from her illness, and touched her – conveyed his healing power upon her. And, he did all that against the very

legalistic rules, which had beaten down her personhood. Jesus set her free in so many different ways!

Luke informed us in verse 14, “*The official of the synagogue was angry that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, so he spoke up and said to the people, ‘There are six days in which we should work; so come during those days and be healed, but not on the Sabbath!’*” Now, it was very curious that the synagogue official chastised the people who wanted healing – maybe only that woman, who was ill for 18 years, instead of the healer, Jesus! Maybe, he understood Jesus was “looking for trouble” and sought to avoid giving it to him by trying to order the people to submit to the Sabbath Law, instead of addressing Jesus. If that was the case, the official was doomed to fail because the woman did not ask Jesus to heal her – for he went out of his way to issue her freedom from the disease and from all the Jewish Law, which had pushed her down.

Here is where Jesus was “looking for trouble” through which you and me and the crowd in that synagogue were all freed from bondage to the

legalists' laws and rules! **Jesus did that by responding to the official and the crowd in verse 15, “*You hypocrites! Any one of you would untie your ox or your donkey from the stall and take it out to give it water on the Sabbath.*”** Jesus confronted everyone with some of those exceptions through which they worked on the Sabbath, when it meant protecting the value of their property and livestock.

Then, Jesus completed his “looking for trouble” in the situation – his seeking to set us all free from the Law and anything else, which might try to prevent us from following our Divine Parent’s and Jesus’ examples of Agape Love toward someone else. **In verse 16 Jesus continued, “*Now here is this descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept in bonds for eighteen years; should she not be released on the Sabbath?*”** With those words, Jesus freed the woman to reclaim her place among the people of God and he exposed the fallacy that God’s Law demands we not agape love another person in need on the Sabbath. Jesus, also, skillfully made

any disagreement with his argument very difficult because he set the scene up as a battle between Satan's bondage and God's Freedom.

Indeed, Jesus provided us all freedom from bondage to the Law – he set us free, for Luke reported in verse 17, “*His answer made his enemies ashamed of themselves, while the people rejoiced over all the wonderful things that he did.*” The healed woman “praised God” when Jesus set her free – healed her! Let us also praise God for setting us free from bondage to the Old Testament Law, for now, all of us are transformed by God's Agape Love from enemies of God to our Divine Parent's children and people! Let's be guided and enabled – set free to agape love all people, especially those in need. Instead of being the bully or a self-server “looking for trouble”, let's follow Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who “looked for trouble”, so the woman, who had been ill for 18 years, and we are set free from bondage of the Jewish Law, and thus, free to agape love everyone. Amen.

