

We have just celebrated our 70th Independence Day this week as we remembered and rejoiced in our freedom from the British. Our theme for this morning's meditation is that, 'God has called us to be free'. If God has called us to be free then what are we to be free from? What are the kind of bondages that we are stuck in from which God calls us to be free? We may not be slaves in the physical sense of the word, but there are many things in our lives which holds us captive and without which we think we cannot live. In our modern world if the internet is down for some time or if our cell phones are not working we seem to feel as though we cannot live the day without it. If there is anything that takes control of our life then we become a slave to it. We can become slaves to the internet, or to money, or to work or to anything else. We can also become slaves to our sinful nature that whatever we do is controlled by our selfish sinful nature rather than by God's word. Sinful habits like being addicted to alcohol or drugs, or lust or anything else can also keep us in bondage. When God promises to set us free he wants to set us free in all aspects of life, but primarily from sin which is the root of all bondage. Sin keeps us bound in its clutches that we find it difficult to get out of it.

In the Gospel reading from St Luke Chapter 13 we see that while Jesus was teaching in the synagogue a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit for eighteen years was present. She was bent over and could not straighten up. Physical ailments can sometimes be caused by unholy spiritual activity. When Jesus saw her he was filled with compassion as he empathized with her sufferings. He called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." The woman who was bent over immediately straightened up and praised God.

The leader of the synagogue however was very unhappy that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. So he tells the people that there are six days for work and that they must come on those six days in order to be healed and not on the Sabbath. Jesus rebukes them and says, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?" If they were so concerned about their cattle that they made sure that they got the water they needed then why not the concern for this woman who was bent over to be healed on the Sabbath day. Jesus further says, "should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

Jesus takes the initiative in the woman's restoration. Jesus tells her 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' He tells her that God's release has come for her and lays his hands on her. Her restoration is immediate, and she gives glory to the God who stands behind her deliverance. It is interesting to note that although it was Jesus who healed her she praises God because she believed that it was God who healed her.

The synagogue ruler has no capacity to enter into the thrill of the woman's restoration. The keeping of the law had become more important to him than rejoicing over the healing of a person who had become bent over. He resented that his synagogue service had been disturbed. He had lost control over his little kingdom. Very often we resent the healing of other people because we think that we are more spiritual than the others. Spiritual pride can blind us. Our following God can become legalistic that we tend to lose sight of God's wonderful doings in the lives of other people.

This woman is a "daughter of Abraham" as Zacchaeus will later be a "son of Abraham": one of God's chosen People. Satan stands behind the afflictions of life. The role given him in illness here draws all the healings into the orbit of the sentiment that the kingdom of God has come upon you (11:20). "The woman's restriction is compared to that of an animal that is not free to get to the drinking water that it needs. The animal is not left tethered for one day; the woman has been restricted in this way for eighteen years! And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"

The adversaries were all put to shame and the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him. As we began we saw that God has called each one of us to be free. No matter what our bondages are: whether it be alcohol or drugs or pornography or adultery or lust, or lying or anything else that holds us back from coming closer to God, may we offer those at the foot of the cross so that Christ may indeed set us free.