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*The Sabbath Named Freedom*

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Whenever August rolls around and Ole and I set off on our 2 day plus road trip to see family north of the border I often find myself thinking of a quote from a friend of mine: *change of place+change of pace=change in perspective.*

It is one of the things I enjoy about driving as opposed to flying. When you set off in a certain place and are traveling to another you see everything in between on your way to the final destination. We love to watch the topography change and evolve as we plug along headed north and west. Through the cornfields of Illinois, the driftless area of Wisconsin, the rolling hills of Minnesota, and the big skies of North Dakota. Which by the way offer some of the best sunsets in my opinion. As an easily excited person I will often say, louder than I need to, "Ole, look at that!!"

Those skies give way to the spacious prairies of western Canada. Pace and place change and so does our perspective, naturally.

In order to enjoy those views you have to look out the window. Which can be quite a task with so much else to do as the hours tick by. Reading, podcasts, daydreaming, scrolling through social media, or taking a nap. All activities are only reserved for passengers and not drivers, but activities none-the-less. Even with such enjoyable views there are plenty of reasons to not look up or out.

There are those among us whose quality of life is hindered and diminished because we are physically unable to see very well. And there are those of us for whom sight has become blurred or obstructed by many things not physical.

She is unnamed and yet we know at least part of her story. Bent over for 18 years Luke tells us a spirit had crippled her. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. Richard Caemmerer has a painting imagining what her perspective would have been.

Her view has only been of her feet and the ground beneath them for so long.

It's worth noting that the term crippled is complicated. It has been used to demean, as a slur, as a

word ascribing *value* or lack thereof. Also, we all know, you can be physically bent over and able to stand up straight in Christ, and you can stand tall and strong yet be weighed down by much.

She does not say a word, let alone ask to be healed. Jesus does what he always does. He notices the one who is oppressed, the one hanging out at the margins, the one in need. He touches her wounded body with his hands that will soon know the fullest extent of human pain as they are stretched out on the cross.

Power flowing through the one who will be laid in a tomb and then, three days later, stand up again, this beloved child of God, stood up straight and immediately began praising God. Ailment gone, her new life unfolding before her, she no longer is captive to the views below her, but her field of vision itself is restored. I wonder what she saw and who she noticed for what felt like the first time? What stories did she tell and where did she go from here? What was her testimony? What was her song that flowed forth so effortlessly from her lips?

Whatever our physical condition, we know well the condition of our hearts. Still living in the shadow where sin seems to hold sway. In this woman we might see ourselves.

As we go through our lives maybe it feels as though there is a backpack on our shoulders. Filled with bricks. Weighed down and exhausted. Bricks with names like illness, pain, anxiety, the stress of hurried life and demands. Bricks like generational expectations or technology and its pressures. Bricks we put in our own backpack, bricks put in by others, and the bricks put in by this still broken world. Those bricks do what they do. Force us to only look down and miss all that is in front of us. For her, 18 years must have felt like an eternity. It does for us too. Those backpacks become inseparable from us.

Her testimony has some in common with ours. Just as he touched her and her burdens were lifted and bondage broken. We have been touched by the one who has died and risen again. Those hands that still bear the marks of nails now bear you up. He has delivered you from all that feels so heavy and permanent. We now stand straight up. Forgiven and made new, we are confident and clear about who we are and who we belong too. And who holds our time in those hands.

Teachers— you help your students stand tall in who God says they are in your own ways.

In his triumph over the grave you too have been guaranteed a tomorrow where Friday gives way to Sunday. World refined and purified by the consuming fire of our redeeming God and God's death destroying love.

We can say along with our sister who suffered for so long and Frederick Beuchner, loved by so many of us at Grace, who this week completed his baptismal journey: “The worst isn't the last thing.”

We have received a Kingdom that cannot be shaken in the end and that becomes our beginning.

Standing up as his body on earth we lift up our eyes. We are living signs of the coming horizon. Fractured, imperfect body and all. Along the road we begin to notice others and their eyes. We treat bodies of all kinds with honor including our own. We listen to those whose bodies have been wounded or are simply different from ours. Whose bodies have testified to yours of its worth and belovedness? Which bodies have set yours free? Sharing backpack stories with hope-infused solidarity. We practice acceptable worship, offering food to the hungry and satisfying the needs of the afflicted. We rejoice at the work of our true sabbath, Jesus Christ. Our rest and dwelling. In his work we are not threatened. He is at work no matter the day or the hour. When we watch him setting captives free, we cannot help but sing in that cosmic chorus with them. Even if he does it on a day or in a way different than how we would plan it. Even if it challenges our traditions, or views of Scriptures. Or provokes a glance of suspicion. We need not be indignant. The table is wide enough for all of us.

We take our seat as the gospel is enacted in front of our windshield. Getting our neighbors attention: Check it out. Look at God. Let's get out. We have a story to tell.

Something like,

Bless the Lord, | O my soul,\* and forget not | all his benefits. He redeems your life | from the grave\* and crowns you with mercy and | lovingkindness.