

"My Chains Are Gone"

August 25, 2013

Luke 13: 10-17

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹ And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. ¹² And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." ¹³ And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. ¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the sabbath day." ¹⁵ Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" ¹⁷ As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

Amazing Grace is a familiar and wonderful tune we all know and are familiar with. In fact most of us probably have it memorized. Some things we may not know about it or I might just be reminding you of some pretty neat information about one of our 'classic' hymns. Amazing Grace was written by John Newton, English Poet and Clergyman, to accompany a New Year's sermon in 1773 and was officially published in 1779. It is unknown if it had a particular tune to it to begin with because Hymn books initially were just words sung to familiar tunes. Over the past centuries it has been used in a variety of ways to various accompaniments. The most familiar tune we know today came about around 1835 to the tune "New Britain" which was a popular pub song of the time.

Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone) is another version of Amazing Grace by Chris Tomlin. Written specifically for the cinematically compelling movie entitled "Amazing Grace". The movie actually attempts to give us a glimpse of John Newton's life and why the song was written. Let us listen to it now.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-4NFvI5U9w>

Beautiful rendition is it not? And if you have never seen the movie, from which many of the scenes in the video are depicted, I do recommend. Interestingly enough this version of Amazing Grace actually musically ties into our particular history as Disciples of Christ. Bet you did not expect that did you? We as Disciples of Christ come from what is historically called the Second Great Awakening movement in the United States. Amongst Protestant faiths the first was when Protestantism began, think the 95 Theses by Martin Luther and other theologians in protest of what the Catholic Church had become at the time. The Second Great Awakening was in part a United States movement and was brought about through revivals and camp meetings like the largest one recorded held at Cane Ridge and hosted by the likes of Barton W. Stone. That place and his name should sound familiar as it is Stone and Alexander Campbell along with his father Thomas Campbell and another pastor by the name of Walter Scott whose grass root movements of reformation and renewal led to our church, the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ formation and beginnings.

It was at these camp meetings, like that of Cane Ridge that simple and deeply theological songs like Amazing Grace or other old familiar hymns were used. They would use the familiar verses and in the contemporary style of the time would add in a familiar praise chorus from another song and people would just sing along with the song leaders and praise God at these meetings. It had to have been incredible. We are talking thousands of people drove from hundreds of miles in wagons and on horseback to attend these meetings. They packed up their entire households and took weeks in the hot summer without air conditioning to be there sleeping under the stars and cooking over camp fires.

They did this because they realized the importance of God in their lives and because it was also the thing to do. Church was the center of the world. It was where you went on Sunday, often morning and evening, it was where you went on Wednesday for a prayer meeting, the church held all the town events and social gatherings. Church time was sacred and very specific behavior was required.

Very specific behavior required on Sunday? Very specific behavior expected on Sabbath Day or during a Holy Time. Is this not what Jesus encountered in our scripture today? Exegetically and in accordance to the Law of Moses and before the law of Moses, God rested on the seventh day and so we rest. We reserve our time for Worship to specifically be for God and God alone. The first commandment is "You shall have no other God before me". The ancients lived their lives as closely to the law as possible, and in some ways chained themselves to the very laws under which they were living. I mean have you ever really read Leviticus and poured through the other books of the Torah and or Tanuk, the scriptures of the law that the ancients followed? They were detailed, specific, and meant to keep us one with God.

Yet here was Jesus, being his wonderful new age self. Preaching and teaching all about God's love through the laws. Showing again and again God's love was the ultimate law like in this example of the woman who for 18 years as a cripple, bent over and unable to stand, who was then healed by Jesus. She was made new, unchained from what was quite literally weighing her down. Yet, the keepers of the spiritual law, the religious leaders of the community upbraided Jesus for doing healing on the Sabbath day, there were six other days with which to do healing on, Sunday's were reserved for Worshiping God. Now why I can not completely disagree with that statement Jesus surprised them because he laid claim to the fact that all deserve a day of rest from the chains that hold us down. He uses the example of the donkey and ox being untied or unchained so that they could rest and truly worship God. Too was the woman given her rest so that she could fully worship God.

The Pharisees were so caught up in the laws that they could not help themselves in some ways and they could not see what was directly in front of them. They were so chained to the laws that they could not live and worship God fully themselves. I believe that we as the church sometimes find ourselves in the same position as the Pharisees. We get so chained by who we were and what once was that we can not see what is front of us, we struggle like the Pharisees to see that what is new is not really new but rather a new vision of the old, in fact it brings us closer to the original intent. It is what our very Church was founded on as Disciples of Christ. Our chains are gone we've been set free because our God our Savior ransomed me. Amen.