

“That Which Cannot Be Shaken”
Isaiah 5:1-7; Hebrews 12:18-29;
Luke 12:49-56

August 14, 2016
Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

Things that can be shaken. Well, I know my life has been shaken multiple times. I remember not long after Helen and I were married, there was a phone call in the middle of the night. Those middle of the night phone calls make you wish there were no phones. Indeed, this was one of those calls. It was a call letting us know that a family member had died unexpectedly. Our world was shaken.

It's interesting how easy it is for our world to be shaken. I think about other moments that were life-shaking. Maybe you can remember when John F. Kennedy was shot. Perhaps there's something about remembering those moments. I remember the moment when the earthquake in San Francisco happened and the freeways came down. I remember where I was when I saw the planes fly into those towers on 9/11. I remember waking up on a Sunday morning to the news of a tsunami in East Asia—over 200,000 people lost. There are moments in our lives that are earth-shaking and it feels like they have kept coming at too great a rate. There are moments in our lives when things feel shaken and uncertain.

Now, there are lots of ways to deal with that shaking, that uncertainty. It feels to me like I try to make my world a world in which things cannot be shaken. I try to identify what I can do keep it from being shaken. Maybe I can unplug the phone at night. What are the things I can do to stop that shaking, because sometimes all that shaking makes me feel bent over and bound and unable to live fully. That's the description, by the way, of the woman that Jesus saw that Sabbath day. It says she was bent over and bound. And then she encountered Jesus. She encountered Jesus and was no longer bent over and bound. She was able to stand and was free, and she began praising God.

I don't think all of us are going to come in bent over and feeling quite as bound as she physically looked, and yet there are times in our lives in which I feel that being bent over and bound describes it pretty well.

I had a friend—we'll call him Jim—who, when he was in high school, was a pretty good golfer. He lived in a family that lived for sports. He was always training. His father was his coach. He got pretty good. By the time he was in high school, it looked like he was on track to have the state championship of a big state. He knew where his life was going. He was going to finish high school, go off to a good golf college, and become a pro. His world got shaken a bit when he had a wrist that wouldn't work anymore. Something happened to it. Maybe it was over-use. Whatever it was, it became painful to play golf. He couldn't practice as much as he needed to. He couldn't make the shots he used to make. His world was shaken. His life had been planned. He didn't know what to do. He didn't have any other plan. One day he heard a sermon, and in that sermon he encountered Christ. He recognized the love of God in Jesus

Christ and it changed his life. It's what we might call a conversion experience. He suddenly realized that the purpose he had had for his life had been shaken, was gone, and now he was given a new purpose or a new sense of value. He knew he was valued by a God who loved him and it changed his life. He ended up using his abilities, not on the sports field, but he learned to be a coach and to coach others in doing things that are very good in a helping profession. It changed his life.

Not everyone has that moment when you realize the love of God in Jesus Christ in the fullness that changes your life, but sometimes it happens in increments. Sometimes you get to a point and all of a sudden realize it is the love of God in Jesus Christ that has changed your life. It changes us from a world that can be shaken into a love of God in Jesus Christ that cannot be shaken. It's an introduction into a new way of living, a new sense of purpose.

I think that that's this story about the woman coming to Jesus. This story is in some ways all of our stories because all of us, I think, have had a life-shaking experience. You're certainly lucky if you've never experienced anything that's bent you down or bound you up. I remember being a basketball player, and my coach giving us this motivational speech in which he said, "None of you will ever be great basketball players, but you can try." Talk about being bent over and bound up! How many times have you been told, "You can't really do this" or "You're not really that kind of person?" We get bound up and it bends us over, or we try so hard to deal with the things of our lives.

I was listening to a talk this week where a guy was talking about growing up as an abused child. He said there are two ways of responding. One is to let that overwhelm us and forever keep us in a submissive way of living, binding us in a way that doesn't enable us to fully live. But he said there's another kind of binding that can happen as well. That kind of binding is where we decide that we're not going to let anyone tell us who we are, and we are going to prove who we are. So it's the idea of somebody being told, "You can't be a lawyer," so they go out and show that they can be a lawyer. Somebody is told they aren't college material, so they go and prove they are by getting a PhD. Either way there can be a binding up because you are bound to doing something you maybe don't even enjoy because you've just got to prove you can do it. The question he asked was what's our purpose in life? What gives us value?

When the woman came to Jesus, he unbent her and unbound her and gave her life because he gave her the love of God, a real healing. There is this individual experience of meeting Jesus, of meeting God and knowing the love of God in Jesus Christ that changes our lives. I think it's real, and it works, and it continues. It's part of the unshaken kingdom.

The thing about this story is that it's a little like what Paul Harvey used to say—and now for the rest of the story—because it's not just about the woman. There's someone else in this story who is bent over and bound up. It happens to be a religious guy, the religious leader, the one who said, "You can't do this on a Sabbath." He didn't quite get what God was giving us in the Sabbath. In another place, Jesus said the Sabbath is

made for us; we're not made for the Sabbath. The point is, the Sabbath is given to us to open us up, to give us time, to enable us to have rest and time to be with God. It's not a time to close us off from doing what's good, but it frees us.

Remember I started out by talking about how I can try to make my world be a world that's not shaken. I can do it by defining things that I think even God might have said. This kind of story always makes me a little leery of saying, "This is what God said so I know it's true," because I think that's what this guy would have said. But the question is, is the love of God in Jesus Christ shining through? How is God transforming our lives?

When we are unbent and unbound, it's not so that life is static. So oftentimes when I try to make my life unshaken, I try to make it so nothing can move. But when Jesus unbends and unbinds the woman, she can now praise God. She goes off in praise. Another way of saying that is that she might go off dancing.

You see, when we begin to enter into the kingdom that is unshaken we encounter the consuming fire, as Hebrews puts it, of Jesus. It's because the dross of our unrealistic world is being consumed and we get to know that the reality of God's love is what makes the world go around. It's the foundation on which we build. We are invited into a kingdom that cannot be shaken because it is a kingdom based in the love of God in Jesus Christ that we can experience. It changes us. It may even change the nature of the world we live in—not quite so rule-bound, but maybe a little more full of dancing.

We get to dance with Christ as he leads us into life, into a reality that cannot be shaken. Sometimes the world is a difficult place to live, but when we have the reality of Christ with us we have a reality that cannot be shaken. Amen.