

Sermon August 24th 2025

“Known, Unbound, and Unshaken”

The lectionary this week gifts us with three extraordinary texts. At first glance, they seem to sit far apart—Jeremiah’s call, a vision of God’s holiness in Hebrews, and the healing of a bent-over woman in Luke. But if we listen carefully, I think we hear one song running through them all: the song of a God who sees us, calls us, frees us, and draws us into a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

“The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’”

These are among the most tender lines in Scripture. The God Jeremiah encounters is not distant or indifferent, not a faceless ruler barking orders from a throne. This is a God who leans close. A God who says: *I know you, Jeremiah. I have always known you.*

Before Jeremiah took his first breath, before his parents even spoke his name, he was known. And not only known, but set apart for a purpose. This is an intimate God, who touches Jeremiah’s mouth with a holy hand—like a parent gently brushing the lips of a child, like a lover tenderly caressing the beloved’s face.

And yet Jeremiah’s first response is not confidence but protest: “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” Jeremiah feels unworthy, inadequate, incomplete. But the divine reply comes swift and sure: “Do not be afraid... I am with you.”

This is the heartbeat of calling. Not that we are strong enough, or eloquent enough, or wise enough, but that God is with us. God’s presence is our worthiness.

From Jeremiah’s intimate garden, Hebrews whisks us to the mountain. The writer recalls the terrifying scene of Sinai, when Israel gathered at the foot of the mountain, trembling as God descended in fire and smoke. The holiness of God was so fierce, so unapproachable, that to touch the mountain meant death.

It is a vision of God’s majesty that makes us tremble. “Our God is a consuming fire,” the text declares. And yet—something has changed. For in Christ, we no longer stand at Sinai in terror, barred from approach. Now, we come to Zion, the city of the living God, where innumerable angels gather in festal assembly. We come not to

exclusion but to welcome, not to fear but to joy, not to shaking mountains but to a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Do you feel the contrast? We live in a world of shaking. Economies rise and fall. Governments tremble. Our own bodies fail us. Our hearts quake under the weight of grief and worry. And yet, Hebrews insists, we are receiving “a kingdom that cannot be shaken.”

It is as if the writer is saying: Do not put your trust in what is fragile. Do not build your life on what crumbles. Build instead on the God who knows you before birth, who calls you by name, who claims you for a kingdom that stands forever.

And then comes Luke.

I don't know her name. I don't know where she comes from. I don't know why she appears in the synagogue on that particular Sabbath day. But I can picture her: a weary woman, resilient and resigned. A woman bent over, “quite unable to stand up straight.” A woman whose days are spent staring at the ground, her vision full of dust and feet, her face never lifted to the sky.

For eighteen years she has lived like this. Eighteen years of being bent low, of being looked past, of being unseen. I wonder if she came to the synagogue every Sabbath, shuffling through the doors in quiet hope. Or perhaps she came that day without hope at all, simply because it was her habit.

And then—Jesus sees her. She does not ask for help. She does not push her way forward. She does not even speak. But he sees her. He calls her over, interrupts his sermon, lays his hands on her and declares: “You are set free from your ailment.”

Immediately she stands up straight. Imagine it: the first deep breath in eighteen years. The first glimpse of faces instead of feet. The first sight of sky, of stars, of the sun rising over the horizon. Immediately she stands, and immediately she praises God.

But not everyone rejoices. The leader of the synagogue, alarmed at the disruption, insists that healing should not be done on the Sabbath. His concern is not trivial—he wants to honour the law, to keep holy tradition. Yet in his zeal, he misses the heart of God's law: compassion. Mercy. The restoration of dignity.

Jesus' response is fierce: “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?”

Notice what he does. He names her as “a daughter of Abraham.” Not just a crippled woman. Not just a problem. But a daughter. An heir. One of God’s own covenant people. He restores her to community, to dignity, to belonging.

When we place these three readings side by side, what do we see?

In Jeremiah, we see a God of intimacy—who knew us before birth, who touches us tenderly, who assures us we need not fear.

In Hebrews, we see a God of majesty—consuming fire, holy and awesome, yet who in Christ welcomes us into a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

And in Luke, we see a God of compassion—who sees the bent-over, who interrupts tradition to bring healing, who restores the nameless to dignity and belonging.

These are not three different gods. They are one and the same: the God who knows us, the God who calls us, the God who frees us, the God who shakes loose what is brittle so that we may stand in what is eternal.

God says: “Do not be afraid. I am with you.”

Jesus says: “You are set free.”

The Spirit says: “You are receiving a kingdom that endures forever.”

Friends, the God we worship is both tender and awesome, intimate and majestic, compassionate and holy. This God knew you before you were born. This God welcomes you to a city of angels and saints. This God sees you in your bent-over places and says, “Stand tall. Be free.”

May we, as Christ’s Church, be the community where people stand tall. Where shame is lifted, dignity is restored, and praise rises freely. May we be unshaken not because life is easy, but because our lives are built on the unshakable kingdom of God.

And may we never forget the beautiful truth whispered to Jeremiah, declared in Hebrews, embodied in Jesus: You are known. You are loved. You are free.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.