

## Sermon: Growing Community – A Kingdom that Heals and Frees

### Introduction

As a church, we are already a community of generosity and welcome. We see this in our mother-and-toddler groups, Thursday caring groups, and the many ways we reach out to others. But today's theme invites us to go deeper: What do we, as the Church, truly offer to the wider community?

It is not about:

- Trying to look good in society,
- Acting out of intellectual philanthropy, or
- Promoting universal values for their own sake.

We serve because our faith—whether strong or weak—shapes who we are. We believe in the community of Christ. And at the heart of that belief is this truth:

- Every human being bears the image of God.
- God has breathed life into all creation.
- Therefore, every life carries dignity and deserves fullness.

This is why the Church matters—not only for Christians, but for everyone. Yet Jesus calls us beyond good works and human dignity alone. Today's readings challenge us to rediscover something deeper. Let me begin with a story.

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### The Squirrel Story

There was a small town with four churches—Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic, and Anglican—and all had the same problem: squirrels.

- The Presbyterians said: *"It's predestined. Let them stay."*
- The Methodists acted in love—trapped and released them. Three days later, they came back.
- The Catholics used incense—the squirrels stayed and loved the smell.
- The Anglicans? They baptized them—and they never returned!

Sometimes, like those churches, we think rituals alone will solve the problem. But people don't need empty traditions. They need the living Christ—bringing meaning, healing, freedom, and joy to life.

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### The Gospel in Luke 13

Now step into the synagogue in Luke 13. Jesus is teaching. A woman walks in—bent over for eighteen years.

Think about her:

- Physically: She cannot stand straight.
- Socially: She cannot look anyone in the eye—not even see the sky.
- Spiritually: Jesus says she has been bound by Satan.

Imagine her life: humiliation, hopelessness, hearing for 18 years, *"This is just the way things are."*

But then Jesus sees her. He calls her forward:

*“Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.”*

He touches her. She straightens up. The first face she sees is His.

But then comes opposition:

- The synagogue ruler protests: *“Not today! It’s the Sabbath!”*
- Jesus replies: *“You untie your donkey on the Sabbath—should not this daughter of Abraham be set free?”*

Here is the Gospel in one sentence:

- The system says: *“This is how things are.”*
- Jesus says: *“This is how things should be—in God’s Kingdom: free, whole, restored.”*

### Three Words for Growing Community

#### 1. The Church is a Place of Freedom

Jesus says: *“You are set free.”*

Today, many are bent down—not physically, but by technology, consumerism, and relentless pressure to perform.

Sabbath becomes an act of resistance—a declaration that my worth is not in my work, speed, or success, but in God’s love.

French philosopher Jacques Ellul warned of a world dominated by necessity—the fatal logic: *“If it can be done, it must be done.”* That bends us down spiritually. But Christ says:

*“You are not bound by necessity—you are free.”*

Jesus’ message is clear: Life can never be secondary to traditions, economies, or cultural narratives. Jesus does not tell us to throw away our religious practices. Instead, He calls us to find their deeper meaning—a meaning that empowers life, rooted in God’s mercy and grace.

That is why the Gospel is universally relevant—not just for churchgoers, but for all. This is why the Church matters for everyone.

When someone walks through our doors—unsure of what to expect—we do more than greet them. We welcome them so they truly belong. Many come carrying heavy burdens, illness, or painful realities. When we receive them with love, something powerful happens: they begin to feel valued, cared for, and even freed from their weight. In India, Christians touched the untouchable people and many of the untouchable people followed Christ feeling freedom from their caste bondage. Church is a place where forgiveness replaces condemnation, where grace outweighs judgment, and where every person is valued beyond status, culture, or past mistakes. When the Church lives this out, it becomes a sanctuary where people experience release from burdens and discover hope and wholeness.

Because God’s Kingdom is about setting people free.

## 2. The Church is a Place of Healing

Jesus healed because love cannot remain silent in the face of suffering.

Let me share a story: A missionary named Sawyer near my village was given funds to build a church. But a plague struck. Instead, he built a hospital. Later, the local people built the church themselves. That place is now called Sawyerpuram, where I studied.

Healing is not just physical—it is relational, emotional, and spiritual. When anger is replaced by peace, when despair gives way to hope—that's healing. Jesus healed because that's what love does—on roadsides, in synagogues, among crowds. His healing was a public witness to God's love:

- No payment required.
- No status check.
- No exclusion.

He touched those others avoided. He saw bodies as sacred—not perfect, but beloved.

In the Commonwealth of Christ, healthcare would not be a commodity but a communal vow—not because it's cost-effective, but because healing is what the Kingdom looks like when it draws near. Many people carry wounds—of loss, failure, injustice, or guilt. The Church becomes a place where these wounds can be acknowledged, where people are heard without judgment, and where hope is rekindled through grace and compassion.

Through prayer, worship, sacraments, and genuine community, the Church offers the assurance that no one suffers alone. This healing is rooted in Christ's promise: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). When the Church truly lives this calling, it becomes a sanctuary where brokenness meets restoration and despair turns to hope.

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## 3. The Church is a Place of Joyful Welcome, a place of mercy and grace

When people are freed from burdens and experience healing, the Church becomes a joyful place—a glimpse of Mount Zion. When you are visiting the British Parliament, you may not miss two icons at the entrance of rooms – one represents justice and the other represents mercy on which our democratic principles are developed at the centre crown and on the top the cross. Mercy is an important aspect of our social thinking and conversation.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us:

- We do not stand at Mount Sinai—a place of fear.
- We stand at Mount Zion:
  - The city of the Living God.
  - A joyful assembly.
  - Where Jesus mediates a better covenant.

Our faith is not fear-driven but grace-driven. In a world that shakes, what cannot be shaken is God's Kingdom—and we belong to it. While I was teaching

mission at Birmingham, I had a student who was a former drug seller. He asked me whether he could work among the drug addicts and develop a congregation, I said why not. After he worked for two years, he had a congregation of 20 members all former drug addicts turned to Christ. He told me that he created a space of healing, a space of welcome, a space for freedom and a space of joy for them. Many gave up their drugs for they saw a space where they can see their worth, welcomed and mercy experienced.

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### What Does This Mean for St Mary's?

- St Mary's is for everyone—because God breathed life into everyone. We are called to welcome strangers and newcomers with love.
- St Mary's is a place of healing—these stones have heard prayers, tears, and cries. We receive people with their burdens and walk with them toward hope.
- St Mary's is countercultural—we resist the idols of productivity, consumerism, and empty narratives. Here, people are set free—from fear, guilt, and anything that enslaves them.
- Here, mercy triumphs over fear, and life is affirmed above everything else.

Today we seek to develop confidence in our church which is a space for freedom, healing and inclusive welcome. We are also a transforming community that changes the dehumanising conversations to life affirming conversations. We need to empower ourselves as welcoming, receiving and inviting community.

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### Conclusion: The Straightening Word

The woman in Luke 13 could not free herself. Neither can we. But Jesus calls us and says:

*"You are set free."*

In a world bent down by fear, necessity, and false gods, Jesus declares:

*"You belong to a Kingdom that cannot be shaken."*

So stand up straight. Lift your eyes to Jesus. Live with gratitude and awe—unshaken, even as the world trembles.

Amen.