**An unshakable kingdom of freedom and grace Ordinary Sunday 21C (24 August) 2025**

**Jeremiah 1:4-10, Hebrews 12:18-29, Luke 13:10-17 Waiapu Cathedral**

We belong to an unshakable kingdom, you and I. And in a world that so often wobbles with uncertainty, that truth matters. Whether the instability lies in the world around us or within our own hearts, it helps to remember: God remains steadfast. Luke shows us Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, proclaiming the kingdom of God – not just in words, but in action. It’s a kingdom shaped by freedom, grace, and love. Today’s readings reveal that love in motion: liberating the bound, breaking through barriers, and confronting the limits we face – whether imposed by others or by ourselves. And when that liberating love takes hold, we’re invited to become the people God is calling us to be. Following Jesus, we’re drawn into that unshakable kingdom—and called to lead others there too.

Jeremiah hears a call from God to a task that seems way too big for him. Maybe we hear this and disconnect, thinking Jeremiah was somehow special, but notice how quickly he compares himself with others—older, more experienced, more gifted. Don’t we do the same? That has “impostor syndrome” written all over it.

And it’s such a typical call story. Most people in scripture, when God calls, respond with, “No, not me – you’ve got the wrong person.” I know I’ve tried that line myself. But God’s answer to Jeremiah is the same answer God gives us: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.” God created each of us for a purpose and gives us the gifts we need to fulfil it. Our first task is not to compare ourselves with others, but to trust God and become the people we were made to be. Jeremiah was called to focus, not on his inadequacy, but on God’s strength. So are we. Each of us is called to join in God’s work – speaking truth, embodying grace, building the kingdom with love – and we can help one another discern what our part is.

Jeremiah was called to set aside his fears and trust in God’s strength – and so are we. The kingdom we belong to is unshakable because it’s grounded in an unshakable God: a God we approach with reverence, awe, and deep gratitude. The writer to the Hebrews calls us back – back to God, and back to the people God longs for us to become. We worship and serve a God of majesty, a God who’s bigger than we can ever imagine, and who loves us more than we can ever believe. That grandeur isn’t meant to frighten us – but it does invite us to pause, to pay attention, and to stand in awe before the utter holiness of the God at the heart of our lives, the God who wants to transform us. In a world of shifting values and fragile systems, we’re rooted in a kingdom that can’t be shaken. So how do we live—day by day—with reverence, with gratitude, and with hope, stepping into the freedom God offers?

We see this freedom at work when Jesus meets a woman who’s been bent over for eighteen years, unable to stand tall or live fully. Bent over like that, unable to look people in the eye, she must have known others only by their feet. I wonder about her struggle to be seen and heard: how many people, over the years, had ignored her, had literally overlooked her, as she went about her life? So often the most disabling thing isn’t the condition itself but how others respond to it. But Jesus sees her. He calls her forward, names her a daughter of Abraham, and then sets her free. Before she even stands up straight, he’s affirmed her worth and her place in God’s community, the God who had known her and loved her and called her for a purpose since before she was born. And when she does rise, she begins to praise God. If we ever feel unseen or insignificant, remember: Jesus sees us, too, and longs to free us from whatever keeps us bound.

And all this happens in a synagogue on the Sabbath – a day set apart for rest and worship. Only then the leader of the synagogue starts to complain. Let’s not get fall into the trap of casting him as the bad guy – essentially this is a debate about faithful practice carried out by two faithful Jews. The synagogue leader emphasises the rules about Sabbath-keeping,though he somehow forgets that the command about not working on the Sabbath was given to the people on Mount Sinai by the God who had liberated them from slavery in Egypt. The commandments are on the side of freedom, grace, and love. When Jesus says, “does not each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman … be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?” he reveals the heart of God’s kingdom, characterised by compassion, justice, and freedom.

This story challenges us to set that same sense of freedom, grace, and love at the centre of what we think about God and about ourselves. What limitations do we need to be freed from – and how did they get there? Have they come from something someone’s said or done to us, or have we made our own limitations? Where might we be limiting others? Where are we being called to free others from the barriers that society, or even religion, puts in their way, so they too can become the people God’s called them to be? Where are people struggling to be seen and heard – and what can we do about that? How are we doing at making God’s kingdom present in our community?

What I’ve found is that it’s easy to forget – especially when we allow ourselves to get over-busy with all the things we think we should be doing, or when we dive down the rabbit-hole of comparing ourselves with others – that we live “in the city of the living God,” as the writer to the Hebrews puts it. We can forget we live constantly in the presence of the living God who’s known us and loved us and called us for a purpose since before we were born. We can forget that we’re part of an unshakable kingdom.

So let us go on and live as people who belong in God’s unshakable kingdom—people who know they are seen, known, and called by the living God. Let us live with courage, not comparison; with compassion, not constraint. Let us be those who, like Jeremiah, trust the call even when it feels too big, and who, like the woman in the synagogue, rise into the fullness of life when Jesus speaks freedom. And above all, let us be those who, shaped by reverence and gratitude, reflect the heart of the kingdom – a kingdom of grace, justice, and love – in every place we go. Because in a world that shakes, we are held by a God who does not. And that changes everything.

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