

Sermon 22/8/2010

Luke 13: 10–17 Bent over woman seen and healed

Demon possessed!

She shouldn't even be here!

How did she get in?

Unclean.

There's plenty of other days for healing — not today!

Unseemly, defiling our purity.

And he shouts, shouts out to her. He notices. He acknowledges her. He speaks to her. He touches her. He heals ... why? Why today? It's not urgent says the priest. I don't understand. I don't get it.

They grumbled, but we said 'it's just old Elinor, she's harmless, she's always been like that — bent over almost double. 'Demon possessed.' they say, but she's alright, nice woman, a faithful one, we let her in, hide her from prying eyes. It's nice that she's healed, but it wasn't urgent — not something that has to be done on the Sabbath, not a matter of life and death. It's against the rules you know, and we are very strict about that — proud even, It's what sets us apart as Jews. He must understand that! The people mustn't get ideas!

She says "They don't see me, they see my disability, which is part of me, not all of me. They don't see my potential, see that I too am a beloved child of God ... but He does. He sees me, sees my hopes, my dreams, my desires, even though these days they are pretty faint.

Sees me. Now he speaks to me. Now he touches me. I am not constrained. I can move again. I can stand up straight. I can believe again, hope again, Trust.

I saw the movie 'South Solitary' on Thursday. A new Lighthousekeeper arrives on South Solitary with his niece. She is confined and defined by her past mistakes. She is not seen for who she is ... until she is seen and loved by a man psychologically disabled by war. She sees him, and he her and in the end, they are healed, oh he still has what you would call post traumatic stress, she still carries the scars of her hysterectomy, and sad losses and desire for affection, but they see past that, past their woundedness, to a companionship, and more, forged through adversity, but blossoming nonetheless.

God does not define us by our problems or our past, and if God does not, why should we? (p113 Seasons of the Spirit, Congregational Life). 'Bent double woman' had to believe that her prime identity was that of a Daughter of Abraham, a beautiful child of God. Her sights are raised by Jesus to see who she is more clearly in the eyes of God.

The critic in us says ... no, this is not the way we've always been — not today, wait. Change is not now, not for now, for another day.

Jesus is stern. 'Don't you care for your animals? Why not for a daughter of Abraham?'

Jesus defines her inheritance, not her limits. He sees the potential, the possibility always, especially on the Sabbath. The critic on our shoulder, from fundamentalist days, from atheist days, says

Don't

Can't

Instead of can and will. Opening up, unfolding, flowering, blossoming, growing, enabling, healing.

Face the critic and call it/him/her for what it is. Face the critic and silence her! Silence him! Turn to what you know in your heart, your guts, your head, is life giving, freeing, healing. Follow Jesus in this.

Today is our Sabbath. What is Jesus saying to you? Look him in the eye, if you are not too bent over, allow him to look at you with love and say: I see you. In the words of that film Avatar — I see you. Do not be afraid. You are free from your ailments. I stand alongside you. I advocate on your behalf.

Being loved, being seen, I can stand taller, more confident, free — and can affirm and encourage others too.

'One of the less savoury aspects of contemporary society seems to be the desire to categorise people according to their deficiencies, rather than call them by their names. So we talk about the physically challenged, the mentally challenged, the abuse victim, the anorexic, the overeater, the divorcee, the single parent, the cross-dresser, the agoraphobic.

And true as these descriptions might be, there are two greater truths with which we have to deal in the face of Jesus Christ. The one is that God does not define us by our problems or our past. And if God does not, why should we?

... The bent double woman who Jesus healed would never have been completely cured as long as she was diminished by the stigma which had been attached to her. She had both to talk and to believe that her prime identity was that of a Daughter of Abraham, a beautiful child of God!.' (John Bell. *This is the Day*, compilation C 2002 Neil Poynton, Wild Goose Publications).

The woman's sight is raised by Jesus in Luke 13:10–17, not just to see better, but to see who she is more clearly in the eyes of God. When has this happened to you? When do we speak of inclusion but continue to act exclusively? What are some steps we could take to include, to free, to accept?

Who among us is bent over in some way? How might you as an individual, or we as a group reach out in invitation, acceptance, love and invite them to the centre of our community life?

I SEE YOU !