

Trinity 10 21 August 2022 - a reflection by David Nye

Luke 13.10-17 The woman with the bent back

Of all the gospel writers St. Luke is the one who records more healing miracles carried out by Jesus than any of the other writers. Perhaps that is not a surprise. After all, Luke was a physician and had a great interest in healing. And he is the only one who records that wonderful story about the healing of the woman whose back had been bent for 18 years. How marvellous it must have been for her to be cured after the pain, the indignity and the helplessness she must have felt for so many years. But would you believe it, all the man in charge of the synagogue could say was to complain about Jesus because the rules didn't allow for someone to be healed on the sabbath. Well, there are some interesting issues in all this.

First, God wants us to be whole. God did not intend human life to be marked by conflict and suffering. Every single one of us has been created in the image of God and in Christ that image is perfection. The world is not perfect, human lives are not perfect because we have rebelled and corrupted our relationship with our maker. Some would suggest that suffering is somehow God's judgment on a corrupt and evil world. That suggestion is really nothing but blasphemy for it denies the considerable time that God through Jesus spent in addressing human suffering. It denies the numerous healing miracles that are signs that God is at work to bring about the establishment of his kingdom – the complete opposite of what is being suggested. It also denies that humankind is somehow innocent and has no responsibility for the anguish and suffering of the world. Jesus himself experienced great suffering: during his trial and finally on the cross. Yet through that suffering he won a decisive victory over the forces of evil responsible for disharmony and despoilation of the perfect creation. Let us not deny that there are very many unanswered questions about suffering: we simply do not know all the answers. And we will not know the complete story until the perfection of God's kingdom and the restoration of all his people.

That's the second lesson for us. We should look at this miracle as a parable for the restoration of body, mind and spirit of all God's people. Nowadays, we understand much more that healing involves not just our physical bodies but our minds and our souls as well. We can only function properly if we are fit for purpose in body mind and spirit. The healing ministry of Jesus was all about holistic wellbeing and we need to remember that unless we are at one with ourselves, unless we live at peace with God, with our family, with our friends, unless we look after our bodies, we cannot hope to live as God would want us to live. God's will is for all of us to be set free from our suffering and from the shackles that prevent us being free people. We have a part to play in showing our compassion, our concern and our understanding for those in pain. We cannot always expect someone else to go to their help. That's the third lesson from this miracle, compassion.

Compassion is more than just feeling sorry for someone. It is more than just understanding their predicament. Being compassionate means standing alongside those in need, sharing

their problems and doing something to help just like the Good Samaritan. And not at all like the ruler of the synagogue in this story. His love of the system was greater than his love for the sick woman. And sometimes our society seems like that. It is almost as though we are losing the freedom to make up our own minds, to do what we want to do without infringing some petty byelaw or regulation. We forget and society forgets at its peril, that we are all individuals, all precious and all God's creatures. Being compassionate to each other, taking positive action, caring for each other, loving God: these are all infinitely more important than the rules. If in doubt, abandon the red tape, if you can.

Jesus healed the sick woman even though it was the sabbath because he saw her need for wholeness. It is God's intent that all his children should be free from pain and suffering and freed from the bonds that bind them. We have a vital part to play in keeping ourselves fit and ready for his calling and in showing compassion to all those in need. What a challenge!