

**THE RULES THAT ARE MADE TO BE BROKEN** (Lindfield 25<sup>th</sup> August 2019)

**LUKE 13:10-17**

She was in the Synagogue on the Sabbath as was her custom. Jesus saw her and healed her. He did talk about her sins having been forgiven, in fact there was no theological talk at all. He simply said, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity" and she could stand up straight. Maybe it was severe arthritis or osteoporosis. We don't know how old she was but for 18 years all she could see was the ground. All she saw of the world were other people's feet and the dusty street. No admiring the horizon or the night sky.

As a woman of faith maybe she proclaimed those wonderful words from Ps. 103:

*Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name.*

*Bless the Lord O my soul, and do not forget his benefits –*

*Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,*

*Who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy...."*

Imagine how, all of a sudden, every single one of those beliefs about God, the bent-over woman could now feel in her standing-up-straight body. As she immediately praised God we see these utterances of her soul, this embodied faith, make the most appropriate response.

She recognised who was responsible for her healing. So praise is the obvious response. She would have known the psalms that speak of God working vindication and justice for all who are oppressed, including her. Note that in the original Greek the phrase, "and she began to praise God" is written in the Perfect Tense which means that she didn't just praise God at that one time she went on praising God in that it then became part of her way of life. She praised God then and she continued to praise God.

Jesus just saw her in the crowd. She would have been very easy to overlook – quite literally. You could cast a glance over the crowd and totally miss her but Jesus didn't. Just as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee and amid all the busyness that was going on he saw 2 fisherman, Simon and Andrew.

And now she is able to see the world through a whole new set of lenses. Once only able to stare at the ground, only able to get an alternate view by straining her neck for some sidelight sight, only able to look at her own feet or those of another but never able to look into their eyes, now she can see their faces. Now she can see where she is going. Now she can see that God is

merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love – just as the Psalmist said. Not that she didn't see that before but it's different when the love of God becomes incarnated in your very self. She is now able to see what and who Jesus sees – who needs to be cured. Those who are bent over with the weight of the world that continues not to care.

That is what Jesus is trying to get the Leader of the Synagogue to see. When you are able to see what Jesus sees; it is not just another perspective but an alternative way of living and leadership.

That's what so many people do not understand, even reject today. When God does what the nature of God is - mercy, grace and love – then mercy, grace and love are how we are to be towards others. If mercy, grace and love were the litmus tests for the leaders in our midst, both secular and religious, there would be far fewer candidates eligible for election.

It is far easier to point to a rule and castigate someone for breaking it. When Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath because he healed the woman he easily pointed out their hypocrisy. He said that they all lead out their ox or their donkey to give it water, was that not work? They knew he was right of course but if they admitted it they would be saying that an ox or donkey was more valuable than this woman. He said it for them: *then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?*

If God's kingdom is one of mercy, grace and love what better to show it than to heal this woman. What better day to do it than on the Sabbath which was a day to stop your usual activities and reflect on the goodness of God and how we ought to respond to that goodness in our lives.

Jesus would say on another occasion, *The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath.* Here is the perfect example of that in action. These rules or commandments were never intended to be a burden to the people but a way to keep them on track in their relationship with God but they became ends in themselves, rather than means to an end. When rules become ends rather than means then we know we have things back to front. They can be weapons of control and power rather than aids to compassion and a compass to check our direction.

We see it when rules about immigration are used to send people back to their home country even though it will break up a family and may even lead to a law abiding person going to a place where they no longer have any

family and where they may even be persecuted. Of course we need rules but we also need common sense and compassion. Rules should reflect the character and nature of God.

This leads us into the whole realm of Christian Ethics which we cannot explore here but there are hundreds of books on the topic.

Just to say here, our way has to be a different way. We have to believe that our way, as Christians, must be different from the way of the world. I believe the world needs us and the way we offer. The world needs to see that the ways of the Church mean willing to heal on the Sabbath. To call out the hypocrites. To name evil where we see it alive and flourishing. To release the captives even in the face of righteous indignation. All for the sake of those who for too long have been bent over by the systems that perpetuate bondage and say to them, "Stand up!" for you are all truly the sons and daughters of Abraham. AMEN.

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