

The Sad Indignant Religious

Reading: Gospel of Luke 13:10-17

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." ¹³ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴ But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day."

¹⁵ But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" ¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

A woman suffers. She is, as we sometimes say, 'crippled with pain'. People crippled by pain are usually not just crippled physically - their crippling pain affects them in every area of their life. Such people are too sore to engage in life's joys, they are not free to walk, run, jump or dance. They are affected physically, emotionally and spiritually - they are crippled *through and through*.

This woman in the Gospel reading today had been crippled for 18 years. 18 days in hospital is a long time out of life, 18 years is a very long time to be alive but not living, a long time to be in pain, and in 'crippling pain'. When Jesus sees her, he doesn't hesitate, he wastes no time, he rushes, "When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.""

The passage reads with *wonderful urgency*. He utters these words and then we read of him putting his hands on her. His 'loving touch'! He backs up his life-giving words with loving action: and don't the two go together: love and life, loving and life giving, loving and life restoring.

I had a funeral at our Boolaroo church on Friday. I had never worked with Dailey Family Funerals before so we had to establish things that I have long established with other funeral directors, the practicalities... would they walk in with me at the start, would I hand out the flowers for placing on the coffin, would I or they announce for pall bearers to come forward and how we would exit... these and more practicalities. They also wondered about the length of my service. Some 'church funerals' go on for hours you see! After the funeral the funeral director thanked me and commented on how, in his opinion, the service was just what he understood the family were hoping for. The family had told me they didn't want it to be too religious, not over the top with religious jargon and so on. It was mentioned that some churches are not very accommodating at all, and that the family *would get what they were served!* In other words the funeral service in the church is like this... like it or lump it!

I said I loved people far too much to have that kind of attitude or approach, for me *the funeral service is made for the family*, and not the other way round. Jesus meets the need of this woman in the synagogue even if the synagogue doesn't practice such healing. The synagogue Jesus points out can be a healing place, even if it wasn't designed for that and even if it hasn't happened in the past because to Jesus' mind and to God... people matter more than synagogue and more than the Sabbath.

To the Jews the Sabbath was sacred, sacrosanct, and untouchable, forever to be revered – it was protected in religious law. Jesus says that people are more sacred, sacrosanct, and more to be revered than the Sabbath. Don't forget that at this time the religious view on illness, crippling illness, was that it was a punishment from God. Those of that generation believed that this woman was *rightly suffering*, that she deserved it, and that it was *her punishment from God* – that was how they saw it. To their mind Jesus had no right to heal her and liberate her. I entitled my sermon for today, 'the sad indignant religious.' These people are what Jesus calls, 'hypocrites'; they profess one thing, belief in God but reveal no belief in God for their neighbour.

Not only does Jesus free this woman from everything... physical, emotional and spiritual that cripples her but he heals these sad narrow minded religious people too and opens them up to the great, expansive and unbound love of God. Some would see it and embrace it and enter into this new way, others would love their narrow faith, limited faith, and judgmental faith and not follow the Jesus way.

Before their eyes, they were given the very best message any Sabbath had ever seen: Jesus loved this female in her ailment, loved her through her ailment, and loved her in the face of condemnation. And his love of her lifted her up – against all the odds. Can you see this event in your minds eye? Can you see her joy, her ecstatic delight? How she must have danced! And how some sad indignant religious would have said, "we don't dance on the Sabbath... and we certainly don't dance in the synagogue." And Jesus would have danced with her. Jesus, Lord of the dance!

Jesus reveals a vision of God that is engaging, engaging with us in ways we had never appreciated. He reveals a vision of God where God is close because God cares for everything about us, everything in our life: all that we go through, our ailments, our pains, our faults and failings and our joys. And Jesus reveals God's involvement with each of us despite what others may think or what we may even think of ourselves.

Others may well think *you deserve it!* This is precisely when Jesus rushes in your direction, to your aid, despite their thinking, and hurries to say, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." He doesn't delay, he acts immediately, he looks into her face, into her eyes and into her life and to her he says, "You are free from your infirmity".

Remember on another occasion where Jesus acted like this? Again it was in the face of the religious who had condemned a female in the community, condemned for committing adultery. On that occasion Jesus showed their hypocrisy again and said, "Let the one without sin cast the first stone!" And once again Jesus set that woman free from guilt and condemnation - and from death as she was about to be stoned to death. Some of the religious that day would have taken his words of life, love and grace to heart and entered into God's way, while others would have hated Jesus for his words and would still have wanted to throw their stone.

We can see why people flocked to Jesus, for his word of life... they even said to him "I'm not going anywhere for you alone have the words of eternal life." His words restored people to life; he had a way of seeing people and revealed God's way of seeing people, He revealed God's way of loving people and leading them back to life. Even those who were dead, like Lazarus, Jesus reached out to and drew back into life, showing that love never ends, that God's love reaches even beyond death.

Sunday by Sunday it is my great privilege to speak, preach and tell of this Jesus. He is my only message every Sunday. The other saints of the various world faiths get a word of appreciation in passing but, it's all about Jesus; He is God's beloved Son, the one we are to listen to, he is to be our focus, he is the one we are to look at, consider and reflect upon. His word to us is the word we are to take to heart and his words are to drown out all other voices. Let all other voices fade as you hear the voice of Jesus; let all other voices out there *and in here* fade as you hear only His voice, as he says, "you are free".

The word of God to you today, against all the odds, against all rules, traditions, and expectation is "you are free." In the name of Jesus Christ, you are free. Thanks be to God!