

Luke 13:10-17

Now is the Time

I knocked and then walked into the room. It was the first time I would meet this woman. A veteran of WWII living at Sunnybrook Veteran's Center in Toronto, she now sat in a wheel chair. She was bent forward, her face toward the ground. I introduced myself expecting that she would sit up to greet me. She never did. She was unable to. Her body was rigidly and permanently in this position.

She turned her head to the side as she responded to my "hello." I will call her Maddy to protect her identity. Maddy, was a wonderful woman. Our conversations were animated. She studied scripture and was part of a Bible Study group. She loved walks outdoors in her wheel chair and was cheerful and friendly. We never looked one another in the eye. It was not possible to do it. At times I would get down on my knees so that we could interact at the same level when I visited. She didn't complain about her condition or anything else. She was interested in others, was compassionate, and content.

Her life hadn't started this way. She had served in WWII with a strong and healthy body, but as the years went by her body changed, and now here she was, not able to look up as she once did at the night sky or see clouds floating across a clear blue sky. Her view of the world coming just a 180 degree from side to side with the view of the floor or ground the resting place for her eyes as she sat in her wheel chair.

In this life, Maddy never experienced healing in her body, and I often think of her when I read the scripture about the woman who had spent eighteen of her years in that position of being bent over. We have few details about the woman. We don't know, if like Maddy, her body had slowly succumbed to the position due to failing health or illness. We don't know how old she was. All we know is that on this particular day she was headed to the synagogue to worship, to learn, and to pray. It was a sabbath day after all. Not unusual behaviour for a person of the Jewish faith. As normal as it is for you to come to church.

We come to church, not expecting to experience some life changing event, but rather to worship, learn, and pray, just as the woman in the story did, so long ago. She did not approach Jesus. She may not have even known who he was, but he knew her. Jesus recognized her as a woman who was suffering and saw her as a daughter of Abraham, meaning she was a child of God. He chose to make a difference in her world in that moment by healing her body. First, he said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment. And "When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God." (v12-13).

She praised God. It was the only thing she could think to do. It was the only appropriate response to the incredible change in her life. But not everyone praised God. The Synagogue leader chastised her and anyone else who might be thinking about getting healed that day saying, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." Can you imagine?! A life changing experience that was witnessed by so many others and the response of the one in charge was, do you have to do that today? You might note he did not chastise Jesus.

And it's not like the leader got it all wrong. There was a command to rest on the seventh day. It was sacred. That command gave rest to everyone – slave or free. It was a recognition that the earth and all that is in it needs rest. The leader was protecting the law and the tradition. There was a place for saving the life of someone in trouble even on a sabbath, but this woman had been in this condition for eighteen years. Could she not have waited another day? Still, this may have been the only time Jesus would encounter this woman. If he did not heal her now, then when?

Jesus decided that now was the time. This was the time to heal, the time to set free a woman who had been in bondage for years.

In May, St. Andrew's had communion to celebrate the church's anniversary. A community member, one who sat on the steps of the church happened in for worship that day. He sat at the back, was visibly inebriated, and praised God throughout the service. As the communion part of the service ended and a hymn was being sung, he came forward to the communion table. I came toward him and he asked for a blessing. People watched in shock and wonder. Some were afraid for my safety, others wondered what we would do with this guy who obviously didn't understand how church operates.

He wanted to kneel for the blessing. I told him he didn't have to kneel before me, but he insisted that he kneel and be blessed. I have to say, that I didn't know quite what was going to happen, but as the congregation watched and sang, the man knelt, with the aid of Sheila our caretaker, and I said a blessing over him. Whatever he experienced in that moment was all from God. I was only the person who said the words and shared love.

When thinking of this experience and what happened in the story of the Jesus healing the crippled woman, I wonder how often we are more like the synagogue leader than the healer that Jesus was. Now I am not suggesting that any of us may have the healing power of Jesus in us, but we are all capable of showing compassion to others in a way that heals their spirit and brings light to their living. Yet how often do we judge whether or not someone did things in the appropriate manner, at the right time, or in the right place.

It is certainly more comfortable when we know what to expect in worship, at work, on the street, in our homes. Even when things are not great, we are more content with what we know than what we don't know. At least we know what to expect. But Jesus is

unpredictable. God is unpredictable and will break into the world at unexpected times and places, with people we did not expect God to be working through or with.

When someone comes to worship with us that is not like us, doesn't know the spoken and unspoken "rules" and disrupts our comfort how do we respond? Is it with judgement or with grace? Do we even come to worship expecting that God will show up?

There are some things that we might ponder from this story today, though there is much more that could be gleaned, but for this moment...one is, do we expect God to show up at church, in our homes, in our lives, and in the lives of others? Are we open to seeing God at work at anytime or are there just certain times that we are looking for God and would be okay with God doing God's thing of healing and restoring people's lives, maybe even our own life?

And if we are putting parameters on God, even for good reason, like law and order that can help all to flourish in safety and community, can we open ourselves up to moments when God comes in and says, "Now is the time".

The Holy Spirit is at work among us at all times. My prayer is that especially when we worship, we might know God with us. May we open ourselves up to the stranger or friend in our midst whether at worship, at home, at work, and at play, that needs to know that now is the time. Now is the time that God is going to do something amazing, life giving, even life changing. May our response be one of praising God.

Look for God at work, for God present with you and others, for now is the time. Praise the Lord. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.