

Luke 13:10-17

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, O LORD, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

You will have to excuse me if I'm a little bleary eyed this morning. I am still getting over an eight-hour time difference, having arrived back from visiting my sister-in-law near Vancouver in Canada on Tuesday evening. We were supposed to have arrived home three days earlier than that, but our flights were cancelled last minute due to strike action, and we had to go through the somewhat stressful process of rebooking our flights with different airlines. When we finally made it on board the first of our alternative flights, we were split up, with my husband Sam and our son Oliver down the front of the plane, and me and our two girls right at the back, just in front of the steward's station. The steward was surprised to see us sitting there because she thought the back seats weren't booked and so I explained that we'd been affected by the strike that it was probably because we had been booked onto the flight late and we'd only just been allocated our seats after some confusion about our booking at check-in. A little way into the flight the air steward tapped me on the shoulder and gave me and the girls a chocolate bar each. It was a small gesture, but it was a kindness that almost brought me to tears because it showed she saw us, and the stress and worry we'd experienced over the last few days, and she acted, as far as within her power, to alleviate it a little.

What is seen and what is unseen is a key aspect in our Gospel reading from Luke today. Jesus sees the woman, bent double and unable to stand up straight. He sees the years that she has suffered. He sees that in going to the synagogue she continues to seek God in her pain, and he sees that she is a daughter of Abraham and a beloved child of God. Jesus sees her ailment and, because it is in his power, he heals her; she doesn't even need to ask him to. This passage is immediately followed by Jesus's parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, parables where small things make a big difference. Jesus heals this one woman, but this healing is a sign of something bigger, it is a sign of the coming of God's Kingdom. This healing also isn't just a physical healing. Luke tells us that the woman's physical infirmity is the result of spiritual oppression. This isn't a demonic possession and nor is there any indication of fault on the part of the woman, but it does mean that she is in need of spiritual as well as physical healing. Therefore, in this healing we see Jesus demonstrate his power over evil, and in doing so, signal who he is. Who Jesus is, his divinity, is immediately recognised by the woman herself when she praises God for what has happened to her. Who Jesus is, however, is entirely missed by the leader of the synagogue.

The leader of the synagogue fails both to see the woman's worth as a daughter of Abraham, and to see who Jesus is. He fails to see that this healing is a sign of Jesus's power over the physical and spiritual realms, to see the clues of Jesus's identity as God's beloved Son, through whom he will establish His Kingdom. This story comes from the middle portion of Luke where Jesus is on the road, teaching the crowds as he is making his way to Jerusalem and towards his crucifixion, and falls within a section

where Jesus's teaching all links to recognising the signs of the times and being ready for the coming of God's kingdom. You may remember that in the Gospel reading from Luke last week, Jesus accuses his listeners of being able to recognise that the weather is about to change, but fail to see the significance behind his ministry. Similarly, the leader focuses in on Jesus acting against the Jewish law by healing on the sabbath rather than on the significance of the healing itself. Jesus repeatedly heals on the sabbath – there are two other accounts elsewhere in Luke and all inspire anger on the part of the Jewish leaders. But Jesus is not working in opposition to the law. When Jesus announces the start of his ministry in Luke 4, he does so by standing in the synagogue and quoting from the prophet Isaiah declaring, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has appointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free'. By healing the woman and liberating her from spiritual oppression, Jesus does not set himself against the purpose of God, he enacts it. As our other reading today, which comes from Hebrews states, Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant; he comes to fulfil the Jewish law and to extend the invitation to restoration of relationship with God to all. Here then is the symbolism in this story. The woman, as a daughter of Abraham, represents the Jewish people and Jesus's actions represent what he offers to his Jewish audience, and to all of us – salvation and restoration. The leader of the synagogue is the personification of what is wrong in the response of the wider religious leadership to Jesus – they do not see who he is and instead see him as a threat to their ways of doing things. They reject Him and instead remain blind to the new spiritual reality.

In his book *The Great Divorce*, CS Lewis says that, 'There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says..., "Thy will be done'. Those who recognise God's saving love through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and those that don't. For those who do see who Jesus is, our response should be to live lives that reflect Jesus; seeing others as beloved children of God and acting in ways, sometimes big, but often small - the kindness of a chocolate bar to a stressed family - that demonstrate God's restoring love to them.

Let's pray. Lord God, open our eyes so that we can see others as you see them. Help us to be sensitive to the prompting of your Holy Spirit and to seeing the opportunities to show your love to others in ways large and small. Amen.