**Luke 13:10-17 Healing on the Sabbath**

The story we’ve just heard is the last record we have of Jesus teaching in the Synagogue. From here on in, he could not teach there – it was too dangerous for him.

In this reading, we see very clearly the issue behind the escalating conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Jesus was the very fulfilment of the law. As the Son of God, he embodied the love, compassion and freedom that were at the heart of the law, while the Scribes & Pharisees were concerned more with the letter of the law; and with the order and control that was necessary to keep the machine of Judaism functioning.

In one way, their almost paranoid need to be in control was understandable. The Romans had stripped from the Jews so many of their rights and freedoms, that their identity as a people was threatened. They saw Jesus in the same light as the Romans - a subversive and destructive influence that was a threat to their faith and culture. Consequently they sought to bring him down at every opportunity.

In this incident, as Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, his attention was drawn to a poor crippled woman who was bent almost double. His heart went out to her, and he called her over to him. Placing his hands on her, he completely healed her. She stood erect for the first time in 18 years and began praising God. It caused quite a stir!

The leader of the synagogue immediately challenged Jesus’ keeping of the Sabbath law. Healing was considered work, so Jesus was accused of being a law-breaker!

In reality, Jesus was simply fulfilling the law – the law of love – and he pointed them back to where it said that if it was lawful to unbind an *animal* on a Sabbath and lead it away to give it water, surely it was lawful to unbind a daughter of Abraham and lead her out of bondage to a disease.

His critics were silenced and the people rejoiced at what God had done.

As we reflect on how Jesus interacted with this poor afflicted woman in the synagogue, we find that there are three things we can take with us into our own lives of discipleship:

1. First, we notice that Jesus **took the initiative to** help this woman. She didn’t come to him asking to be healed. Jesus saw her suffering and his heart went out to her. He called her over, and moved by compassion, placed his hands on her and made her whole.

I wonder how the community and the church would be affected if more of God’s people were to act as Jesus did, and take the initiative to simply be compassionate at every opportunity. In Ephesians 2, Paul tells us, “For we are what (God) has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” It is actually our *calling* as disciples of Christ, to engage in good works as a way of life. And opportunities to show compassion, and to do good are always out there.

When I was in Queensland for a conference last year, the friend I stayed with went to a church that had a very effective way of helping their members find opportunities to be compassionate in their everyday lives. They’ve developed a scheme called “ARK”, which stands for Acts of Random Kindness. They look for any opportunity to show kindness to perfect strangers, and when they do, they hand out a colourful orange card which says “You’ve just been ARKED!” On the back is an explanation of what “ARK” is all about and the church’s details.

They’ll carry an elderly person’s shopping to their car for them. They’ll offer to babysit for a stressed mum. They’ll mow a neighbour’s lawn. They’ll hand over change at a checkout if the person in front doesn’t have enough money. They’ll pick up a hitch hiker, invite a backpacker to dinner, visit a shut-in – the list is endless. Needless to say, this scheme has put their church on the map in their community.

An American politician called Bob Kerrey back in 1943 got it right when he said,

“Unexpected kindness is the most powerful, least costly, and most underrated agent of human change.”

1. Secondly, Jesus stepped outside of what was **culturally acceptable** to show God’s love. He actually engaged with a woman in public. That wasn’t done. He touched her. That wasn’t done either. Yet through pushing these particular social and religious boundaries, he led this woman into freedom and worship. It was worth the stir he caused.

Are there cultural mores in our society which prevent us from showing compassion, or doing good deeds? I think there are. Something very deeply ingrained in us is the sense that we mustn’t intrude into another person’s life. If someone is needy, we much prefer to say a quick prayer for them and be on our way.

Earlier this week, I stopped at the Thai restaurant in Moruya on my way home from the hospital and ordered a takeaway for our dinner. As I was waiting outside the restaurant for my meal, I noticed a dishevelled young man, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his hoodie against the cold, standing listlessly about 30 metres from me. He wandered up and down a bit, but mainly just stood about with his hands in his pockets. I thought he looked hungry. Then I thought about my yummy Thai meal and then looked at him, and felt a tug in my heart.

The thought came to me to offer to buy him dinner (it was about 6.00 pm), but do you think I was able to do that? No I couldn’t – not initially. I was most reticent. I didn’t want to interfere. Maybe he was fine. Maybe he was a druggie. Maybe he was an axe murderer. Then again, maybe he was hungry….but I still hung back.

In the end I told myself, “Don’t be stupid Carol. What’s the worst thing that can happen? He can think you’re an interfering goody goody…but is that so bad?” So…I finally screwed up the courage to wander over and strike up a conversation. He was just mooching. Nothing much to do. He was in between jobs, hoping to start a new one the next day. I asked if he was hungry, and said I could buy him dinner if he liked. He smiled and said thanks, but he was fine. So we parted company and I drove off with my Thai dinner.

In the end I don’t know what he thought or how he felt about that encounter. But at least he knows that someone cared about him and I felt that I had obeyed a prompting God gave me. Next time I won’t be quite so chicken!

In our culture, people may be struggling, lonely, needy - even desperate - but if we don’t know them, we generally don’t like to interfere. Of course in an *emergency* Australians are wonderful – generous and hard-working to a fault. But usually it does take an emergency to give us permission to intervene in another person’s life and alleviate their suffering. I think we need to be more alert to our cultural reservations and more willing to move beyond them to show love and compassion. Jesus did, and God was able to do mighty things through him.

1. Thirdly Jesus did not let **opposition** deter him from showing God’s love. Have you ever thought how difficult it must have been for Jesus to keep teaching, healing and loving those around him, when at every turn, someone was trying to trap him, arrest him and kill him? Yet he persevered.

After Jesus returned to heaven, his disciples carried on his ministry – and they too faced opposition. We know that eventually, with the exception of John who was exiled to the island of Patmos, all the apostles were martyred for their faith.

As we speak, in Egypt and Syria, Christians are facing similar opposition. Believers are being persecuted and martyred. The small instances of opposition that we experience really pale into insignificance when we think of what our brothers & sisters in Christ are facing over there at present.

Jesus warned his followers that this would happen, and he encourages us to stand firm in our faith.

We should make the most of every opportunity to show compassion to those who are suffering, and share with them the good news of God’s love.

In John 14, Jesus tells his followers: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”

When Jesus talks about greater works, he’s talking about works on a greater scale. Because he has gone to the Father, his Holy Spirit has come to empower his people. In the power of the Spirit then, we are able to the works that Jesus did.

We may find he uses us to heal the sick, cast out demons, and perhaps even raise the dead – these things have been happening through Christ’s followers since the days of the early church – but more often the works that we will do as Christ’s followers are simple acts of love and compassion; they are words of comfort and encouragement; they are the opportunities we take to share with people the Good News that we can be forgiven, set free and filled with the Holy Spirit through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Let’s reaffirm our commitment to love and serve our Lord this day.

Shall we pray…