

## 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 some things Jesus did that 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? The injunction to 'do good' has come up in our readings a number of times over the last month or so.

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.

Those of you who were at the parish planning day some weeks ago may remember that one of the suggestions that was made was to do something similar to what a Queensland church was doing. This church had found a very effective way of helping their members find opportunities to be compassionate in their everyday lives. They developed a scheme called "ARK", which

stands for Acts of Random Kindness. They looked for opportunities to show kindness to perfect strangers, and when they did, they handed out a colourful orange card which said “You’ve just been ARKED!” On the back was an explanation of what “ARK” was all about and the church’s details.

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

Parish council talked about this at their last meeting, and we decided it sounded like a great idea - though the ‘you’ve been ARKED’ approach felt a bit abrupt. So we’re bringing our ideas about how we might do it here to our meeting this week. (Of course you’ve remembered that, PC members, haven’t you?) Watch this space!

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.”

2. 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.

On a recent trip to Canberra for a Bishop in Council meeting, I spotted a hitchhiker thumbing a ride just outside of Braidwood. I don’t pick up hitch hikers as a rule - because they just might be an axe murderer in disguise (which is sad, isn’t it?) But after a shooting quick question to the Lord, I felt okay about it, so stopped and picked him up.

We chatted for a while about nothing much, and then he asked me what I did. When I told him, he spoke of his own contact with the church in years past. He then took the opportunity to completely unload. He told me of his failed marriage, a friend’s suicide, how hard it was having sole custody of his teenage kids, his bitterness towards someone who ripped him off in his business ... it just all poured out. And I listened. In the course of the conversation, we also talked briefly about Jesus and the difference faith can make. By the time I dropped him off in Canberra, I had the sense he was feeling encouraged. He said he might try going to church again. It was one of those God-incidences where I found myself invited into the life and struggles of a perfect stranger. It was holy ground.

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.

3. 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.

We are all aware of the drastic persecution that ISIS is visiting upon Christians in the Middle East, and there is terrible persecution in Africa and Indonesia as well. 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, regardless of any discomfort or opposition we might face.

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 do 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 be better disciples of our Lord this day.

Shall we pray...