

St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA
The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge
Church Year C
Date: 8/21/16
Season: The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 13:10-17

Five days a week for six weeks over the course of this summer it was my duty to present myself at 10:15 am. for radiation treatment at Group Health on Capitol Hill. Group Health is a busy place full of all sorts of different folks in all sorts of different conditions. Now it's no great surprise to know that a large medical center like this is full of sick folks. Some a lot sicker than others. And often folks who seemed to be particularly ill or in particular pain shared another trait. They seemed to be lonely. Not all, for sure. Many folks were accompanied by loved ones or friends. But there were a not insignificant number of people who were hurting physically who also seemed to be hurting emotionally. Not a surprise. I've spent enough time around hospitals in my ministry to know that a significant component in physical healing involves emotional and spiritual resilience; and emotional and spiritual resilience often begins in relationship. In having loving support of another person, a person who gets you and gets what you're going through. Who loves you in the midst of your suffering. A person, in other words, who "sees you." It can make all the difference.

We meet someone this morning who is hurting and suffering and who seems to be all alone. For 18 years, she has been bent over in great pain; she had a spirit that had crippled her for those long years, we're told. Clearly, there was a significant emotional and spiritual component to her suffering. What could it have been like for a woman to be all alone, able to stare only at the ground, able only to see her own feet and the feet of others. Not able to look anyone in the eye. And then, we are told, she is seen. Jesus sees her, calls her over, speaks to her, lays his hands on her. And immediately she stands up straight and begins to praise God. She was seen. She was touched. She was healed. The crippling spirit left her as she was drawn into this new relationship with God. She would have been easy to overlook, just like some of the lonely folks I would see at Group Health. Except Jesus didn't. Jesus saw her. And now she can see with a whole new set of glasses. Now she can see where she is going. Now she can see other people and look into **their** eyes. Now she sees something about God. That God is merciful. That God is compassionate. That God is slow to anger and abounds in steadfast love, as the Hebrew Scriptures, that she would have known so well, put it. She may have known that intellectually before, but it's different when God's love shows up in your very own self.

And you know there was another healing that day, or at least the beginnings of one. Jesus wanted the leaders of the synagogue to see in the way God sees. To see with the eyes of mercy and compassion and grace. To see with the eyes that are slow to anger and that abound in steadfast love. He was really inviting them into a new way of leadership. Leadership based in love and compassion and healing and reconciliation. Leadership not bound up in rigid legal codes. You know, the Gospels have a number of stories about conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities around Sabbath regulations. Jesus will heal a sick person or have his disciples feed hungry people on the Sabbath, and he'll get criticized by the religious authorities for violating the prohibition against working on the Sabbath. Often we'll hear him respond "The Sabbath was made for human beings; human beings weren't made for the Sabbath." Now, as Jesus always points out, the Law is important. In fact, he says in Matthew's gospel, "I did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it." God has given us the Law for our benefit. The Law creates a safe container, gives us boundaries within which we can grow and thrive and become the people God calls us to be.

But for us to be fully human, to be fully alive, for the Law to be truly fulfilled, means that the Law has to be understood through the laws of love and mercy and grace. "The Law was made for human beings. Human beings were not made for the Law."

Can you imagine what it would be like if it were a basic requirement, a prerequisite for leadership in anything, in business, in government, in the Church, that the leaders would walk in love and mercy and grace? Servant leadership, it would be called. The concept of servant leadership in a secular, business context was first articulated by a remarkable man named Robert Greenleaf, well over 40 years ago. Greenleaf was the CEO of AT&T at that time and he imagined a new way of business leadership that was grounded in love and mercy and grace. And he was a highly successful leader. During his leadership AT&T was one of the most admired companies in the world. And can you imagine if we held our political leaders to this standard? What if walking in love and mercy and grace were a prerequisite for holding office? Well, we can dream, can't we?

And what about the church? I mean, that has to be our standard of leadership in the church, doesn't it? But too often, it's not, I'm sad to say. One of the reasons that many in the millennial generation are really avoiding the church is because of leadership that appears to be rigid and legalistic and self-absorbed. Leadership that doesn't walk in love and mercy and grace isn't Jesus' leadership, that's for sure. And I want you to hold me to that standard of leadership. You deserve no less and it's certainly my deepest desire. But I'm a human being and as the Apostle Paul was quick to remind us, as a human being, I'll often fall short of the glory of God.

So hold me accountable to the standard of leadership that walks in love and mercy and grace. And when I fall short, for God's sake and for all our sake's, come and talk to me. When we speak to one another, and hold one another in love and mercy and grace, all things are possible, says Paul.

So this week, what would it be like to see others as Jesus sees us? To see others with the eyes of love and mercy and grace? To resist the temptation to see others through the rigid and legalistic eyes of judgement and critique? To see others as Jesus saw the crippled woman that day in the synagogue. What would that be like?

I want to end with a prayer that's really been speaking to me this week. It's the School Prayer from St. Paul's School, the place I graduated from many years ago. This prayer is meant to describe the qualities that a graduate of St. Paul's should aspire to. And it captures, I think, how we might see others with the eyes of Jesus.

Let us pray.

Grant, O Lord, that in all the joys of life, we may never forget to be kind. Help us to be unselfish in friendship, thoughtful of those less happy than ourselves, and eager to bear the burdens of others, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.