



## Proper 21, Year C – August 22, 2010

Proverbs 22.1-2,8-9

### A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

A young man, perhaps in his mid twenties, sits on the grass along the side of a path, his body racked with the heaves of profound sobbing. His hands held up to his face, shoulders moving up and down with the unmistakable movement of crying, it seems that he can do nothing to hide his grief. Or his sadness. Or his frustration. Or his heartbreak. Or his anger. Or his despair. Whatever it is that is causing the tears he seems unable to stop them as he sits on the grass of the park, sounds wells up from deep within him and is delivered to the world in heart wrenching weeping, salty tears falling to the ground beneath him.

And the people walk by pretending that they are too busy to see.

And now I ask, what would you do?

In this morning's Gospel we hear about Jesus preaching in the temple on the Sabbath. He is on the shores of the Sea of Galilee near where he spent a majority of his ministry. He is on his home turf, if indeed the Son of Man had home turf. He is in his element and people from all around have gathered to hear this man preach a new message of peace and love.

The woman in the story, hunched over for eighteen years, moved heaven and earth to be there on that special day.

There were many laws around the Sabbath about what God meant when he gave a twenty-four hour period over to rest. The Rabbis had painstakingly distilled 39 activities that one could not participate in during the Sabbath, taken from Exodus and Deuteronomy. From each of those prohibited activities came associated tasks like because one could not light a fire, nor could one handle kindling or matches. We do not know from the text whether or not this woman had a family to look after or how she survived financially, but we can expect that, as with all women of the time, the tasks the day before Shabbat were intense in preparation for the day of rest. We can imagine her rushing as she was able to allow herself the time and the privilege of hearing this new preacher preach. It was all she could do to tear herself away for a day.

Now, Jesus sees her in the Temple, hunched over and crippled, and he calls her out. She does not seek him, rather he notices her. Surely he noticed more than her physical pain and disability; he noticed her seclusion and isolation. He knew how difficult it was for her to come to the Temple and he called her out to heal her. "Woman you are set free". And he touched her. And she was healed. And she stood straight. And she praised God.

Jesus took note of her pain and saw her worthy of his attention. Jesus took note of this woman perhaps invisible to many, and centred her out for healing. On the Sabbath. On the day of prohibition from work. He broke all the laws of the very synagogue in which he was preaching.

Alleluia.

The response of the leader of the synagogue is curious. He says that the woman should have come on another day to be healed. That would assume that she had some considerable wealth or influence and would be easily able to slip away from her duties at will. That would assume that this woman was able to get around well enough to be able to make a second trip within a day or two without it being a hardship. That was assuming a lot.

And Jesus calls her "daughter of Abraham". Now, why might he do this? Why might he make reference to her in this way in response to the declaration that

she should have come another day? This phrase “daughter of Abraham” is not seen anywhere else in scripture and makes certain that this woman is counted among the membership of the covenant community. I submit to you that this reference was the main slap in the face to the leader of the Synagogue – Jesus was reminding him that the woman was human; she was more than her disability.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus manages to get himself into considerable trouble by healing on the Sabbath. Jesus draws the line in the proverbial sand, confronting the leader’s rebuke of him and laying claim to a higher commandment, that of the two great commandments, of which Jesus speaks in the twenty-second chapter of Matthew: to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and your neighbour as yourself. By indicating the care taken to unbind livestock so that they may continue to live, he pointed to the care that God has taken for this woman, by unbinding her so that she might fully live.

I asked some of my friends this week about what binds them, what burdens they carry that cause them to hunch over with the weight. I was surprised by some of the answers and not so much by others. I was honoured that they shared with me their deepest hurts, longings, sadness and worries. So I’ll pray for them and with them, listen to them and journey with them, as they throw off the yoke that binds them. Sometimes we are asked but to notice.

The young man sitting at the side of the path perhaps wasn’t seeking attention and most gave him none. The young man sitting in his despair, calling out for a life line through his sobbing moans watches the people walk by through a veil of tears. We do not know the burden that weighs him down but we are called to notice him just as Jesus noticed the woman hunched over from years of pain. We are called to see all of the daughter of Eve and sons of Adam. We are called, like Jesus, to take note of those around us that we might help and not just scurry by.

The scene that I describe is actually from a show called “What Would You Do” on NBC. While the cameras ran people hurried by, rushing to go to an interview about the Christian concept of “who is your neighbour” based on the Good Samaritan. And they rushed by, papers in hand, so focussed on the task at hand that they did not notice their neighbour in pain at the side of the path. And yet they all arrived and spoke about how they were like the Good Samaritan, caring and thoughtful with their neighbours.

What would you do? What do you do when you walk through your life – do you see your neighbour? Can you see beyond your next appointment to someone in need of your time or your talent? Is your Christian faith more about how you live your life than what you profess to believe?

Jesus is so much more than our Saviour. Jesus is so much more than the Son of God who gave his life on the cross for our redemption. Jesus is our teacher and we are called to learn by his good example. We are called to see those sons and daughters of Abraham around us that might be in need of our help. We are called to help one another with the burdens that weigh us down. We are called to help one another lead un-tethered lives, lives in which we can all stand straight and praise God.

And for that, thanks be to God.