

Jesus knows us...      May the words of my mouth and ...

I'm going to begin with a story:

Back in mid-July, I had read this morning's Gospel passage from Luke.

And afterwards, my mind had been dwelling on the woman who had been bent over for 18 long years. I was wondering just what that might look like...

Then, a few days later, as Sharon and I were driving along the Anacortes waterfront, a couple of blocks up ahead of us, I noticed a woman on the sidewalk. She was walking in the same direction as we were traveling.

The woman I saw was bent *sharply* at the waist, but to one side, and not forward. She was walking slowly, with help from a heavy cane. She didn't seem to be struggling or in much pain.

I wondered what her view of this world must be like, because she carried her head at such an acute angle.

I wish I knew what her name was, so when I tell you about her, she could feel more human, and less impersonal.

I wondered many things about her life and her possible struggles.

I wondered how challenging it must be for her to cook her meals, to wash her clothing, even to tie her shoes.

How does her disability impact her feeling of self-worth, her dignity of life?

Her ability to simply function from day to day? The things that you and I take for granted.

This woman *seemed* to have grown comfortable over time with the challenges life had handed her, looking as though she had spent several years adapting to, unwillingly accepting her handicap.

And, yes, seeing her had *immediately* reminded me of the woman in today's Gospel reading.



In our reading this morning about the crippled woman in the Synagogue, she must have been a familiar sight there for the author to have known the details about her.

She had gone to the Synagogue that day for no particular reason other than it was the Sabbath.

She may well have not been aware of Jesus and his disciples also being there.

She may have never even heard anything about Him. And, if she had, it's doubtful that she would have even known what he or his followers looked like.

But – Jesus, who was teaching in that place, was very aware *of her*. His heart was drawn to her. We will never know exactly why, but her presence had captured his attention.

He called out to her. And when she approached, He gently laid His hands on her – and lovingly healed her of her infirmities.

She stood erect for the first time in what must have felt for her like an absolute eternity, never having any hope of being healed.

Jesus' behavior here was very different from the ordinary.

Jesus was forever being approached by others seeking healing, either of their own accord, or by others interceding for them.

People often badgered Him – repeatedly, desperately seeking healing for their loved ones.

But in this story, the woman seemed to be totally unaware of His presence, or who He was.

Jesus had felt a strong calling to reach out to her and bless her with his gift.

I believe that Jesus had felt her unspoken prayers.

And then, in the midst of her great joy and celebration in being healed, she was immediately attacked by the

pompous, over-zealous priests who accused her of coming into *their* holy place on the Sabbath only to be cured.

Jesus' mood swung abruptly from His loving moment with the woman to furious contempt for the priest's heartless assault on the woman and those standing around her.

“You total hypocrites!! How dare you assault her in her moment of joy, her being released from her curse!”

“You yourselves are equally guilty of tending to your *own* livestock for your *own* personal gain, and you easily justify that to yourselves. But when it comes to healing for this woman, you are so *quick* to cry “foul!”

When Jesus spoke of her to the priests, He called her “a Daughter of Abraham”.

Jesus called her this because she mattered. She mattered to Jesus. She matters to all of us.

He harshly reminded the priests that she herself was also an Israelite, along with the rest of them, a descendant of Father Abraham, and just as worthy of God's love.

Jesus is known to have been a champion of the underdogs. Of those who had been cursed, dismissed, or cast aside by the rest of society. Of those whose dignity had been taken away from them.

Jesus regularly came to the defense of the blind, the lame, those cursed with horrible diseases and crippling disabilities through no fault of their own.

The priests and others who were in power constantly attacked Jesus for associating with those who had so little. For “lowering” himself down to the level of the broken, the homeless and the hungry. For his “undignified behavior”.

It seems today that there are an awful lot of people with power and great wealth who are constantly attacking others.

Bullying nice, caring people. Calling them “losers” and other hurtful names. Shaming those who reach out to the unhoused and hungry.

They make fun of the *caring, generous, empathetic* individuals among us who do strive to defend and protect those who don’t have the means to do so for themselves.

It feels like not all that much has changed in the past two thousand years.

And it feels now ... in our nation... like humanity might be trying to follow two different Jesuses... Jesus the triumphant King... or Jesus the loving shepherd.

The Jesus who will come in blazing glory to save only the few select chosen? ... Or the Jesus who comes to live among the poor, the broken, the castoffs in life.

The Jesus who seeks us out, and who protects us even when we don't realize it. Like the Good Shepherd guards his lambs.

The Jesus who knows our needs, even when we don't.

The Jesus who knows what lies within our hearts, even when we can't quite find the words.

Like He does with us every single day of our lives.

Jesus knows us – and answers our needs – even when they remain unspoken.

Like He did with the crippled woman in the Synagogue, the Daughter of Abraham.