

## TAKING JESUS SERIOUSLY - Luke 13:10-17

In the introduction of his book *Jesus Today - A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* Albert Nolan writes: "On the whole we don't take Jesus seriously--whether we call ourselves Christians or not. There are some remarkable exceptions, but by and large we don't love our enemies, we don't turn the other cheek, we don't forgive seventy times seven times, we don't bless those who curse us, we don't share what we have with the poor, and we don't put all our hope and trust in God. My proposal, writes Nolan, will be that we learn to take Jesus seriously.... "

### Reread and Tell the Story

The notes at the bottom of the page in my study Bible point out that this is an unasked for healing. The woman did not speak to Jesus or come near until he called her over. She appeared within his range of vision in her brokenness. Jesus sees her and interrupts his teaching. He heals her, setting her free from the physical and social constraints that have bent her over. He heals her and calls her a daughter of Abraham. He treats her with dignity and addresses her as an heir to the covenant God made with Abraham. The healing appears to be spontaneous and it is done in public. It is a restoration--giving the woman back to herself and to her community. She responds to his laying his hands upon her by immediately standing up straight and praising God.

Now the leader in the synagogue kept saying to the crowd of people there, "There are 6 days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day." An act of mercy has abrogated the rules and challenged the status quo, threatening change. Jesus makes a strong reply saying, "You hypocrites!" Those who would identify themselves as righteous and as authoritative are neither.. They prohibit to this bent-over woman the same common sense care given to farm animals on the Sabbath. Jesus says, 'And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for 18 long years be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?' It is not only permissible but appropriate and fitting that one be set free, experiencing God's saving activity on the day set aside for the Lord. Saying this Jesus redefines the Sabbath. We are told that Jesus' opponents are put to shame and the response of the entire crowd is to rejoice. The New English translation of the Bible has the last sentence: "At these words all his opponents were covered with confusion, while the mass of the people were delighted at all the wonderful things he was doing."

This is a story in which I experience Jesus inviting us to see differently, to see an alternative mode of existence, one ordered not by man-made rules but ordered according to the reality of divine generosity. And God's generosity is based not upon the qualifications of the recipient but on the character of the Giver.

Let me propose some questions that this story might ask us as we more fully engage with it. We might ask ourselves: To whom do I/you/we bring healing? Do we respond spontaneously and publicly with acts that restore someone to himself/herself and to fuller participation in community? How do we treat the dignity of others, especially those persons we do not know?

I am particularly drawn to Jesus' spontaneity in this story and his expression of personal freedom in responding to an opportunity of God. He demonstrates healthy self-possession, knowing who he is and why he is here, free to move in any direction that is called for. He is already living in the reign of God, already living in the future God is laboring to bring into completion.

Another question:

How do we recognize and respond to voices that claim that the suffering and the vulnerable are ineligible to receive the protections and the benefits of society, who say “Why don’t those people act in the right way or take better responsibility for their troubles?” Voices that would have us categorize some people as unworthy and therefore to disallow and to disqualify them. Sorting out those voices is as urgent today as it was then. Jesus did not keep silent but publicly confronted them.

Other things we might let this story evoke and provoke in us--Jesus’ language of “setting free;” the meaning of Sabbath to us today; a deeper look at “hypocrisy”--How we understand that word and how are we guilty of it. Do we present ourselves to God in our brokenness? How have we experienced God’s peace and healing come upon us unbidden?

But one final questions-- How do we begin to “love” as Jesus loves--freely, spontaneously, concretely, in the every day circumstances that present themselves. This kind of love, which I would define as “contributing to well being”, is an orientation, an attitude, a posture toward others that exists in the being of the one who loves. It is not a feeling of warm affection. It is a choice, a commitment, and, importantly, a privileged opportunity and a purpose. Why else are we here?

I think that Jesus does not show us that we should love. He shows us that we may love. To love the way Jesus loves is to become who we really are, fully human and created in the image of divine generosity, in the image of the One who desires and delights in abundant life.

Perhaps then to take Jesus seriously in this story from Luke’s gospel is to be ready to heal and restore, to be prepared to confront the voices that begrudge and disqualify, and to be prepared to contribute to well being whenever the opportunity presents itself. I understand that this will put us in the midst of the political dimension. I believe that when we wrote letters to Congress as part of Bread for the World’s advocacy for low income workers and their families, we participated in healing and restoring dignity. We confronted those voices that would stereotype and disqualify, and we contributed to the well being of others and of all of us.

Jesus’ companionship in our lives opens up opportunities for seeing not the right thing to do based upon conventional wisdom and conventional rules, but the “fitting” thing to do in a world ruled by divine generosity. That “fitting” thing will vary with the particular circumstances but it is grounded in committing ourselves to the way of Jesus in each concrete moment and then acting out of that commitment.

What is at stake here in terms of our lives and taking Jesus seriously?

If you and I want deeper roots, roots that will not be torn up in life’s challenges, and roots that will be foundational for our everyday choices, we will spend time with Jesus. One place we can find him is in his stories in the gospels.

When we return to his stories, enter into them personally and deeply, even live in them a while, we experience Jesus alive. We live in his presence now. And the more we live in his presence, the more we can be shaped by his radical freedom and his courageous love.

Thanks be to God.