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TO BE SEEN

*“Immediately, she straightened up and praised GOD.”*

I have the feeling that when this woman, bent over for eighteen years, was finally able to stand up straight that there was a great chance that words from scripture filled her mind.

- Perhaps the words from Psalm 103:

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me bless HIS holy name.*

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all HIS benefits—*

*who forgives all your sins, who heals all your diseases,*

*who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,*

*who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*

*The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.*

*HE made know HIS ways to Moses, HIS acts to the people of Israel.*

*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”*

In that moment, every single one of those beliefs about GOD, spoken in this psalm, could be felt and claimed by that bent-over-now-standing-up-straight woman.

- And in that very moment for this woman, and in this psalm for us, we are given a glimpse into the true sense of what it means to praise GOD.

- The Psalms are not just words—they are utterances of the soul, faith given life—when life is challenging, when life is uplifting, and everything in between.

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It’s likely that this woman was not in the synagogue, but rather if she wanted to hear GOD’S word and clearly, she did, she had to be outside and away from the building.

- After all, her obvious deformity meant that she was a sinner and unclean.

- It’s nice when you can see who the sinners are, isn’t it?

- She’s a sinner or why else would GOD have punished her in this way?

- At least that’s what they believed in JESUS’ day.

- And so, she would not have been welcomed to come into the presence of GOD.

Yet, this woman is not only healed of her ailment, but also recognizes who is responsible—and thus, there is no response but praise.

- The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed—including her.

In that moment, she doesn’t cry out, “It’s about time, GOD.”

- Or, “Why did YOU make me suffer for so long?”

- It’s easy to do that when you’re in the midst of suffering and even at the end of suffering.

- It’s easy to let our expectations and allow impatience to get in the way of our rejoicing in what GOD is doing.

- But immediately, *she* straightened up and praised GOD.

- And it’s worth noting the verb tense of this phrase.

- In the original Hebrew, it translates, “she began to praise GOD.”

- This is the imperfect form, meaning an ongoing action.

- Her reaction is not just a one time, “Thanks a bunch, GOD!” but now a way of existence—a way of being in the world.

- The implication is that for the rest of her life, she praised GOD for what happened in that one moment.

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Part of what I want to focus on today, though, are those words, “When JESUS saw her...”

- How much of the past eighteen years of her bent-over-in-a-question-mark life had been lived not being seen?
- You know what I mean.
  - We tell our kids not to stare when they notice those who look different, so as not to make those folks feel uncomfortable.
  - We ourselves look the other way, when we see others who we can't help or don't want to help, so that we won't feel uncomfortable.
- But JESUS sees her—JESUS sees her.
  - This is not just an important theme in Luke.
  - It is actually what is necessary to bring about the Kingdom of GOD here and now.
    - She would have been easy to overlook, quite literally.
      - You cast a glance into the crowd and totally miss her.
        - But JESUS didn't. JESUS saw her.

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And now *she* is able to see with a whole new set of lenses.

- For years only able to stare at the ground, only able to look at her own feet or those of another and never into their eyes, only able to look at others sideway by straining her neck-- now she can see faces.
    - Now she is able to see where she is going.
    - Now she is once again part of a community, restored to relationships that in the past were, at the very least, hard to see, and at most had been completely lost.
    - Now she is able to see that GOD *is* gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.
- Not that she didn't know that before, but it's different when the love of GOD becomes incarnate—made flesh—in your very life and self.
- Now she is able to see what JESUS sees:
    - those who need to be cured;
    - those who are in bondage;
    - those who are bent over with the weight of a world that continues not to see.
      - Now she is able to see what JESUS sees: those whose greatest desire in the world is simply to be seen.

JESUS calls for her to come to HIM rather than simply healing her from a distance.

- JESUS touches her who for eighteen years has been shunned.
- JESUS brings her into community and raises her up so that all can see what the nature of GOD truly is.

Because that's what JESUS is trying to get the leader of the synagogue and the rest of the leaders in the church to see:

- that when you are able to see as JESUS sees, it's not just another way of looking at the world,
  - but an alternate way of living in the world.
- That's what many, then and now, do not understand, and even seem to reject:
  - that when GOD shows through action what the nature of GOD is—mercy, grace, and love—
    - then mercy, grace, and love are how we are to be toward others.

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That's the challenge GOD places before us today,

- to see those who we might miss,
  - and those we choose not to see.

I received a call this week from a young mother who wanted to have her three-year-old daughter baptized.

- But she wanted it done in a private ceremony, rather than in the midst of the community in which her daughter might hopefully grow and come to love GOD.
- She wanted a private ceremony because she wasn't sure that everyone would accept her and her family: her daughter, and herself, and her wife.

They have known the looks of those who choose not to accept them.

- They have heard the comments behind their backs and to their faces,
  - and they didn't want to risk having this joyful day of their daughter becoming part of the Body of CHRIST and receiving the promises of the Kingdom of GOD to be marred with the looks and the comments of others.
  - While I said I would be honored to perform the baptism, and told her I would love to see it done publicly in the midst of GOD'S people, I couldn't assure her that the judgment and condemnation wouldn't happen.
    - Though I agreed to do a private baptism, ultimately, she decided to think about it further.

Both this woman and her wife believe in GOD.

- They love GOD and want their daughter to grow in GOD'S love.
- But they also know that, though they believe in GOD and GOD'S grace and love,
  - they also know that, for some, that isn't enough.

I pray that one day, somewhere, this child and her parents receive the love and blessing of GOD, not for who they are, but for who GOD is.

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In this gospel story today, what JESUS wants everyone to see is that GOD calls us to go into the world from a place of grace, mercy, and love,

- to provide healing that includes and is beyond just the physical.
  - JESUS wants us to offer relationship and acceptance and love that is unconditional and inclusive.

Our way has to be different.

- We have to believe that our way is a different way.
  - The world needs to see that the way of JESUS is to see those who desire to be seen,
  - and that HIS followers strive also to see those who desire to be seen;
    - to name evil where we see it alive and well;
    - to release the captives even in the face of righteous indignation;
    - to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of GOD through our words and our actions in the name of JESUS;
    - to see and to act on behalf of those who for too long have been bent over by a world that ignores bondage and to say to them:
      - "Stand up! You have been seen! Through GOD'S mercy and love and grace, you are healed and welcome!
      - "Let us together rejoice and praise GOD because you have been seen!"