

Reflection for Sunday 29th August 2021

Exodus 4:27 - 5: 1

Psalm 116 (read responsively)

Luke 13: 10 - 21

The significance of the day in the narrative of the Gospel reading today cannot be overstressed: it is the Sabbath, the Lord's Day, and Jesus is in the synagogue where he went every seventh day - and let us not forget that he was after all a faithful Jew. It was a day blessed by God in the great creation story of Genesis "...on the seventh day God finished the work he had done and he rested....so God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it...." So as a new testament scholar has put it, what better day for Jesus to do good than the day on which God himself had rested from his triumph over chaos when he had brought order and creation to bear, what better day for Jesus to demonstrate the defeat of what would have been seen as Satan's agent of destruction in this woman whose life was plagued by physical disability and therefore by the culture and religious thinking of her time. by judgement and marginalisation.

With quiet and some drama the woman is healed. "Listen" says Jesus, "she is a daughter of Abraham...she is part of God's great creative design - as much as any of you"

Later in his ministry we shall learn that others too, beyond the realm of Judaism, are also part of that creative design, but here on the Sabbath - the day when God celebrated the completion of his victory over order and chaos - we can glimpse the meaning and the reality of God's realm in all its glory.

Jesus then reminds his listeners that day and us too that just as they would offer water to their ox or donkey on the Sabbath day, how much more important then, than a human being effectively in bondage be offered the divine gift of the water of life....the 'freedom to be'

The day of the Lord, the word of the Lord, the life-giving stream that flows from the throne of God.

A recent Radio 4 "Thought for the Day" speaker, a Muslim commentator and gender, faith equality issues speaker identifying with Muslims caught up in the current crisis in Afghanistan said this: "Women in Afghanistan have had to deal with so much over so many years, I believe they will be strong at this time, they are resilient but we need to listen to them to find out what they need, we need to speak up, and amplify their voices and have our hearts open when they and their families are looking for refuge. We must always have hope. As a Muslim woman it is so hard, once again, seeing my religion being used as a justification for violence and oppression - so opposite to what Islam as faith is all about".

Now returning to the gospel story, what amazes me is that this woman in the story is there in the synagogue at all - that she persisted in her religious observance; we might assume that she was clinging to some vestige of faith and trust that her local community might offer her some small degree of acceptance and healing...but over 18 years!!! Come on!

Alternatively we may perceive she was a person of deep spirituality who knew beyond the human and religious teachings that marginalised her, the very being of God who only includes, affirms and makes whole, those who come to God.

Whoever they are, irrespective of condition - female, male, physically able, disabled, old, young, Gay straight, black, white. Whoever they are.

That woman in the synagogue that day drank fully of the life-giving water presented to her by Christ, the sheer persistence of the Grace of God - grace for us to know, and if we know it, grace that we will joyfully share and declare with all people, just as the woman in the synagogue stood up and began praising God as her faith indicated.

Amen