

Home Retreat; Saturday 16 September 2023

- “..I didn’t want to break the spell..”

an opportunity to read “between the lines” ..”against the grain”..with “our divine spectacles on” the story of the healing of the crippled woman on the Sabbath
[Lk 13; 10-21]

Cold wind of autumn, blowing loud
at dawn, a fortnight overdue,
jostling the doors, & tearing through
my bedroom to rejoin the cloud,
I know..for I can hear the hiss
& scrape of leaves along the floor..
how many boughs, lashed bare by this,
will rake the cluttered sky once more.
tardy, & somewhat south of east,
the sun will rise at length, made known
more by the meagre light increased
than by disk in splendour shown ;
when, having but to turn my head,
through the stripped maple I shall see,
bleak & remembered, patched with red,
the hill all summer hid from me.

[Autumn Daybreak ; Edna St Vincent Millay]

GOSPEL

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 13: 10-21

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity". And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day". Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it. And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? Its is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened".

• Luke 13 ; 10-21..healing of crippled woman on Sabbath..

Now..here & now..present..”the sacrament of present moment”..
Teaching in synagogue on Sabbath..full frontal subversion [10pm BBC news
[= reshaping doctrine] status]
“one of synagogues”..not named..name your place of worship / encounter..
woman..feminine..always an agenda..Jesus relates to all..esp oppressed &
marginalised..

spirit of infirmity..illness..in spirit..in mind?..psycho somatic?..
18 years..long term permanent infirmity..
bent over..creased up by pain?..or weight of infirmity? or emotional spiritual
osteoporosis?..calcium deficiency..a grace deficiency?..
could not fully straighten herself..”unable to hold her head erect”..shamed,
humiliated, avoiding eye contact..”shield me from the glance that knows”
bent over..bent double..as all women..overburdened..

Jesus saw her [1] a small corral of woman back corner synagogue
at distance & in scrum he saw.. “knew”..”this is the one”..

& called her [2] no request from others..Jesus’ chosen initiative
how did he speak do you think?..sculpt it..

..see need for eye to eye recognition equality “known” veh plate recog

..how would a sculpt of your family/community relationship look?

would it surprise you..disappoint..shock..who chose to stand next to you?

“woman you are freed from your infirmity”..your..individual personal..mine

..do I name it?..& thereby for first time in years own it?..

freed..let out..set free from captivity..[invisible prison..Mountjoy]

“laid hands on..” ; cure by touch..man to woman..demolishing laws of ritual
purity..?

...sculpt Easter retreat 04..feet how do they feel?..[apart slightly]”threatening”
[together] “intimate”

“met Jesus in bookshop”..speak to him? “no I didn’t want to break the spell”

..sculpt..Convent Jan 05 Hungarian novice.. [feet apart] [no response]
[together] [“less strict”

“she praised God”..her first “voice” ; one of praise & thanksgiving..not of
plea blame or self pity..it is praise which gracefully gains real healing
[in faith..story of 10 lepers..only one healed physically & spiritually]

what would be..what is..your first voice/word to the divine?..

what word was it this very morning?..or just a steady look of love?

ruler of synagogue “indignant”..notice he ignored Jesus..spoke to people

..chastises lowly & the silent rather than engaging Jesus in debate & risk

losing face on his own home ground..

..he quotes Law..no mention of sexual discrimination but implicit?

ruler..not leader..rule..via rules & regulations..force & fear..rather than

obedience humility & loving service of RSB..Ch 5..

“..the Lord answered”..speaking for lowly & silent..for those bent over .spirit
of infirmity..dumbness & low self esteem..

[who do you speak out for..? ..& who spoke up & out for you this last week?]

- you “hypocrites” actors..maskwearers
 “this woman..a daughter of Abraham” ; part of faith community..
 a place a birthright as much as “Abraham & his sons”
 ..it would have sent shock waves through listeners..an equality in
 faith & relationship..akin to Zacchaeus despised tax collector
 “this son of Abraham”
 “..Zacchaeus come down I must stay with you today”..
 [recovery of woman & Zacchaeus as agents leaders reformers?]
 [articulating alternative vision]
 [attending to different voices]
- ..todays equivalent?..speaking out for divorced & remarried to receive the
 Eucharist..migrants on Dover beach..sick drug addict on Coastliner to Leeds on 2 Sept
 ..bound bent double infirmity for long years..no eye contact with you & I..
 [we the so-called healthy “if only they knew”]
 loosed..“you are set free”..are..here & now..step into it..liberation theology
 if only mankind would do likewise..shackled by Law &
 synagogue..
 ..how are we shackled at present?..enslaved by rule &
 prescription of religion..to a method of prayer..to a
 person..to a habit a relationship an addiction?
 “..from this bond..”legal agreement ..locked into it..or locked out from it?..
 Sabbath day..day for setting free individually in front of community..
- Real divide not men v women but “his adversaries “ united..”all”..”put to
 shame”..still bound & always to be so..unable to see & not wanting to risk
 seeing for fear of consequences of being healed..& life/faith changing..
 & “all the people” “rejoiced”..loosed..& they it
 is who recognise [with faith spectacles on] the glorious things ..
- “mustard seed” ..mans seed?
 “sowed in garden” garden wisdom feminine hokmah [Holy Spirit]
 womb space
 [garden..place of birth..Eden..Gethsemane..Easter]
 “it grew” ..new life ..tree of life..motherhood nest
 ..intimacy..intercourse..procreational & relational

[as is yeast “hid” ..unseen unnoticed but at work fruitful
 fermenting agent..comes to life when in contact with..
 different voices ?..different interpretations ..
 ..reshaping doctrine?
 “semper reformanda”
 woman as agent ..yeast]

- “..to call her a “Daughter of Abraham” was to make her a fully fledged member of the covenant & of equal standing before God with men. To heal her on the Sabbath was to liberate the Sabbath to be a jubilee of release & restoration. To touch her was to revoke the holiness code with its male scruples about menstrual uncleanness & sexual advances. To speak to her in public was to jettison male restraints on women’s freedom..
To place her in the middle of the synagogue was to challenge the male monopoly on the means of grace & access to God.”

[Engaging the Powers; Discernment & Resistance in a World of Domination; Walter Wink. 1992]

- “So well we might ask, what is the reign of God like? to liberate this woman, marginalised by her sex & by her deformity, is to offer liberation to all who have traditionally been excluded. “Daughter of Abraham” is paralleled later when Jesus refers to the despised tax collector Zacchaeus as “Son of Abraham” ..salvation comes to house & temple. The reign of God appears among those considered least likely to manifest it. It breaks through restrictions of law, class & gender. The call to conversion is made to all who would seek to limit the offer of God’s liberating grace. So what is the reign of God like? it is like a woman takes yeast, yeast which can corrupt, & mixes it with three measures of flour until it is all leavened. The woman is preparing the banquet of the Lord. “the people will come from east & west, from north & south, & will eat in the kingdom of God” [Lk 13:29]
The understanding of the Sabbath has been broken open, subverted by the healing of a bent woman who in her body symbolised the suffering of the Israelites for 18yrs under the Amonites [Judges 10:8]. On this hallowed day a woman is liberated & praises God. She, a daughter of Abraham who was a symbol of the suffering of her people, is now a symbol for their liberation. This is a topsy-turvy kingdom; it disrupts & disturbs. It appears where it is least expected; through the healing of a crippled woman praying in the synagogue. Just as the “holiness” of the Sabbath is apparently corrupted, defiled by a healing which transforms the whole concept of “holy” & of “sabbath”, so the apparently corrupt leaven transforms the dough.
Little wonder then that Jerusalem will kill the prophet who preaches a reign of God which manifests itself among the least “indeed some who are last will be first, & some first who will be last.” [Lk 13:30]
So freed from the understanding that this parable formed a self-explanatory maxim about growth from small beginnings, we have a wonderfully subversive text which turns our understanding of God’s reign upside down.
To Luke’s warning “beware the yeast of the Pharisees” we might want to add “beware the taming of the text, beware of taming women! Behold the woman, concealing the yeast, behold the woman revealing the reign of God!”

[from “Concealing Women” in Knowing her Place; by Anne Thurston. 1998]

- ..as she explains how to re read these gospel texts, no longer “going with the grain” & the traditionally safe predictable translation, but now “going against the grain” & discovering the wonders of the subversive text & context of Our Lord’s radical teachings..

- [ex retreat 18yrs ago overseas to Community of Sisters]

mix of their active & contemplative sisters..perhaps 25 Sisters in total..
asked for two volunteers to re-enact scene..
most active [& travelled] sister offered & one [of three] contemplatives..

..immediately contemplative took place of woman bent double
..& active "leader"[an always in waiting superior..full of qualifications skills
but perhaps never to be called?] of Christ
..contemplative went on knees..was she in real role?..I asked her to rise..
spoke her truth quietly powerfully on what it was like to be "bent double"..
..the active Christ full of talk words..no sight line.no eye to eye..nor touch
& all done at a slight standoffish distance..almost as teacher..in role?

...eventually scene enacted..fine but superficial..no hugs nor kisses..few words
no smiles..an air of properness..boundaries..separatedness..the active very
head centred..polite efficient..but little warmth..intimacy..tactile..

..where are they in community?..as individuals..as individuals in their
respective different ways of life?..do they ever meet at depth?..or just for
coffee and a seminar?..
& daily at Mass?..[sacrament of belonging or of safe polite distance?]

..[my thoughts later..active one an expert at legislation..visiting Rome etc..
..brings media attention to plight of prostitutes..but how good would she be at
quietly spending time with them?..& at listening generously without limit?
..an adequate Martha but an unsuitable uneasy & refusing? Mary..]

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through the chinks in the barn,
moving up the bales as the sun moves down.
Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles & her yarn.
Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned in long grass.
Let the stars appear
& the moon disclose her silver horn.
Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down.
Let the shed go black inside.
Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop in the oats,
to air in the lung, let evening come.
Let it come, as it will, & don't be afraid.
God does not leave us comfortless,
so let evening come.

[Let Evening Come ; Jane Kenyon]