

The Invisible Visible

King of Glory Lutheran
August 23-24, 2025
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Year C: Pentecost 11

Luke 13:10-17

10 Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” 13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14 But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day.” 15 But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?” 17 When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.

‘When you do not see others, Jesus confronts you. When others do not see you, Jesus does.’ⁱ

Rev. Jared Alcantara writes this: In a world that struggles to pay attention, one does not have to work hard to be unnoticed. A toddler vies for the attention and affection of her parents. She turns her distracted father toward her, saying, “Look. Look. Me. Me.” In a home with a dozen devices, she pines after their undistracted attention. A middle-aged man walks into a break room at work and sits down with his coworkers. They do not acknowledge him; neither do they invite him to join the conversation. He is with them, but he is alone. A teenage girl posts a selfie on social media. None of her friends click “like” or write comments. Their silence is deafening. Perhaps they want to send her a message without sending her a message. She barely sleeps.

Church let’s pause a moment to reflect upon the invisible people we either did or didn’t see this week. Feel free to name them aloud. (homeless, migrants, hotel room cleaners) Answer this question within your own heart. How many of those

folks wants to be invisible or unseen? Now, also reflect for a moment about when invisible people do get noticed, is that attention generally positive or negative?

What Jesus does in this text is quite remarkable. Women weren't allowed in the sanctuary; particularly women living with disabilities had to stay in the shadows. They couldn't approach a rabbi, or speak to a man in public. The common theology around someone who was disabled was that it was a punishment from God.

Furthermore, men's needs, in this patriarchal society were seen and met, while in general, women's opinions and needs were disregarded. What Jesus does in this text is quite remarkable.

Jesus sees her. He sees her. The invisible was made visible, not only to Jesus but also most likely, to all the villagers.

When the class clown gets to meet privately with the teacher for extra school support, not punishment, what happens? When your grandson is hiding in his room playing video games and you seek him out, what happens? When you go sit with the employee in the lunch lounge who is sitting alone what happens?

You and I live in a world where often we can feel invisible. In this country, the number of people living alone, almost surpasses the number of people living with partners or spouses. Why does the elderly man literally light up when you speak to him while choosing bananas? You're the first person he's talked to all day. Even married people can feel like they are living alone.

It's easy to feel invisible, and I would guess that most of us have at least one friend or community to gather in. It's worse for many other individuals and groups. We would do well to train our eyes to notice the invisible ones.

When Jesus saw her...Jesus sees her. Jesus sees you...and me...when we feel separate. Alone. Isolated. Invisible. God sees us.

This dear woman had not only suffered alone from the psychological pain of being isolated, but also from her very real physical pain. Some theologians think she had a condition where the bones of the spine are fused together creating agonizing pain.ⁱⁱ

It's not hard to notice a cast on an arm, or a limp and a cane. Yet there are silent, invisible wounds, too: migraine headaches, a growing tumor, the bruises underneath long sleeves from an abusive partner, the pain of people's comments because your education certificate is not one that can be framed.

Folks with the most obvious ailments typically get the attention. More challenging, yes, to know how to comfort someone's wounded soul? But Jesus saw her.

Not only did He see her, He called her. Lydia. Mary. Elizabeth. Hannah. Pam. Maggie. Betty. Christine. What would that have been like? 18 years and she hears her name! Her name...from a rabbi's lips. Oh the surprise, the joy, the bewilderment even. Jesus called her.

Then wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles...it gets better! Jesus touched her! He touched her!

Do you remember the wonder of going on a first date and you're sitting in the darkened movie theater and only half paying attention to the show. Because you're really wondering if he will reach over and take your hand? He does!

Or going for a walk in your senior years and she reaches over to take your hand, as she has done a trillion times before. It's familiar and feels like home.

Or your good friend – male or female – sees you and gives you one of those big bear hugs? A touch can mean everything.

God sees her, calls her, touches her and then heals her. Heals her. People of God, whatever it is that is hurting you internally today, trust God can heal it. Because whether we wear that injury on the outside or the inside, God sees it, knows it and can heal it. Do not be afraid to talk to God like you would your friend. Pour out your heart. Pour out your soul. He is listening. He will not abandon you.

The challenging part of this text is of course, if you're listening, and healing hasn't happened to you yet. You've said the prayers, you've waited patiently and not patiently, and these kind of Bible texts are more hurtful than helpful.

If you are listening and this is your reality, the ways of God and the mind of God are not always clear. If your suffering continues, as your pastor, I'm sorry. My door is always open to listen and hear your pain. Yet know this! Jesus does see

you. Your pain is known to Him. Jesus calls you to lean into Him for comfort. Your name is on His lips. His love for you hasn't decreased...in fact God just might be even more fond of you because of your suffering. I believe that as much as I believe Jesus healed this bent woman.

That day, the person everyone looked at, the leader of the church, let it get under his skin that Jesus was in the house, and receiving more attention than himself. Jesus quickly calls him out. 'You hypocrite!' The word hypocrite originates from stage plays where the actors called out lines from underneath their masks. Hypocrite became associated with those pretending to be something they weren't.

Whom shall we see this week, sisters and brothers in Christ? Does our faith have anything to say about those isolated, invisible, broken or in pain? How will our faith move us to respond?

Again, Rev. Alcantara and I quote. 'When you do not see others, Jesus confronts you. When others do not see you, Jesus does.' Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-21-3/commentary-on-luke-1310-17-6>. Jared E. Alcantara.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.