

*11am Eucharist - Trinity 10 Sunday 25th August 2019*

May I speak in the name of God:  
**Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

Today's readings  
Seem chosen to form a triptych  
Three painted panels  
Where the central panel  
Both references and interprets  
The side panels

The reading from Isaiah  
Is focussed  
On earthly life and worship

The reading from the letter  
to the Hebrews  
Points us to the heavenly kingdom

And at the centre  
Is Jesus

and his presence is  
Given substance  
In three words

'Jesus saw her'

Words that lie  
In the heart of today's Gospel  
Words that speak  
Of the heart of the Christian faith

One of the things  
I really value  
About the gospels  
Is the sense they give  
Of the present

Like all good story tellers

The gospel writers place us  
In the middle of events

Close to Jesus  
And the people he journeyed with

Close to Jesus  
And the people he encountered

Close to the people  
who remembered Jesus  
the people who remembered  
what he did  
what he said

And how others reacted to him  
For me  
The most precious stories  
Are the stories of encounter  
The stories when people meet Jesus  
The stories where Jesus  
speaks to individuals

Mostly these encounters are intentional  
People seek Jesus out

In Luke's Gospel  
this starts  
Right from the beginning  
In Luke's account of the Nativity story

The Shepherds are told about Jesus  
They seek him out  
running to see him  
and then go back to the fields  
praising God

Perhaps the most impressive  
Example of people seeking Jesus out  
Is the group of friends  
Who carry their paralysed friend  
onto a roof

Dig through the roof  
And more or less  
Drop their friend on his mat  
In front of Jesus  
It would be hard for Jesus  
Not to see that

Throughout the Gospel  
People come to Jesus  
And ask to be healed  
Or ask for healing  
for their family  
Or their friends

But there are several stories  
Where the encounter is by chance

The call of Matthew  
Is one of them

Matthew is a tax collector  
sitting at the tax booth  
minding his own business

then Jesus sees him  
and calls Matthew to follow him  
and he gets up,  
leaves everything,

and follows Jesus  
I can't help asking myself  
'What did Jesus see  
When he looked at Matthew?  
What did he know and understand?

in today's Gospel reading

A woman who had  
A spirit of infirmity  
Of physical weakness  
Is near Jesus

And Jesus saw her  
And responds to her unspoken need

Jesus calls her over  
Lays his hands on her  
And sets her free from her ailment

And now the woman stands straight  
She can look Jesus  
She sees him  
Knows who he is  
And immediately praises God

The nature of Jesus ministry  
A ministry of healing and restoration

Is spelt out in Luke's gospel  
When Jesus begins his ministry

In a synagogue  
As he reads from Isaiah  
'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

And then Jesus says  
'Today this scripture  
has been fulfilled in your hearing'

Jesus was able  
to set the woman free  
because he saw her

The words translated as 'seeing'  
In the new testament  
Mean much more than  
Not being blind

They hold the meaning  
Of noticing

And of understanding  
And there is a stark contrast  
Between the compassionate action of Jesus  
And the indignation  
Of the leader of the synagogue

Who does not discern  
God's power being shown  
A woman healed  
But can only see  
Rules and laws being broken

This blinkered view  
was not a new problem  
in the first century  
any more than it is now

today's first reading  
dates from the time  
when the people exiled in Babylon  
were allowed to return home  
by the decree of Cyrus in 538 BCE

and in the reading  
the group who the prophet attacks  
are not the people who are unreligious

it is the overcorrect religious group

who are delighted to express their piety  
and yet miss the essential point

God's order of compassionate justice

And the prophet gives a glorious image  
Of a society restored and transformed  
And guided always by the Lord  
If they will replace cold self interest  
With acts of loving kindness

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews  
Takes us forward  
To the end times  
And their description  
Of the Kingdom that cannot be shaken

describing the City of the Living God  
and the worship of heaven  
with angels in festal gathering  
and at the centre  
the glory of God  
the glory of our risen Lord

we have to hold  
these two things  
together



Jesus in Glory  
Glimpsed on earth  
by some of the disciples  
In the moment of transfiguration

And the earthly Jesus  
the man who was in a synagogue  
and saw a woman  
bent over  
bound by a spirit of infirmity

the encounter in the synagogue  
was by chance  
the woman was walking by

and Jesus saw her

being seen  
is a staple of modern life  
in many ways it is the essence  
of social media

but the picture put up  
on facebook or Instagram  
is always tweaked  
to represent  
what we think of  
as our best self

the picture which will achieve  
a lot of likes  
and sometimes loves

a picture which hides our imperfections  
and in doing so  
hides our pain  
and our deepest longings

the call of Jesus  
to follow him  
the challenge of the Gospel  
is to be open to God  
and to our neighbours

to bring our true self  
into the light of God's love  
so that we can be changed  
and grow in the likeness of Christ

the fact we are here today  
means that in some way  
we have all responded to that call

we, like the woman in the gospel  
have put ourself  
in a place of worship

intentionally in the sight of God  
bringing our real selves here

open to the possibility  
of being healed and restored

and we can trust that Jesus  
sees us with compassion  
and love

knowing that  
when Jesus looks at us

he sees in us  
the image of his father

*amen*