

Luke 13:10-17  
August 21, 2016

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

On our family's recent vacation we had a lot of windshield time as we piled up nearly 3,000 miles on the family cruiser. Needless, to say we needed something to fill the time. Lauren and Matt were able to sit in the back seat, headphones on, and watch a movie or play games on their phones but Amanda and I were left watching mile after mile tirelessly go by. To help alleviate this monotonous state Amanda had come prepared, as she so often does, with a series of podcasts downloaded to her phone. One in particular, being an avid sports fan, caught my attention. Author Malcom Gladwell did a series of podcasts titled, "Revisionist History" and this one was on former National Basketball Association (NBA) player Rick Barry. Barry is well-known for many accomplishments on the hardwood including, but he is probably most known for being an excellent free throw shooter. In fact, over his long career he made 90% of his attempts. In the 1978-79 season he shot nearly 95% in a game missing only 9 free throws all season long. Arguably, he is one of the top free throw shooters of all time. But what stood out was the way Barry shot free throws – underhanded as opposed to the style used by nearly every other player in the modern basketball era of shooting the ball from one's chest and shoulder area. Barry claims that shooting the ball underhanded, or "granny" style as it is often referred to, is the technique with the least amount room for error. And even today he questions why players don't use this

method of shooting free throws because there have been plenty of poor shooters in the league including current player DeAndre Jordan of the Los Angeles Clippers who makes only 42% of his free throws, former great Shaquille O'Neal who made 53% of his foul shots, and one of the greatest players of all time Wilt Chamberlain who made 51% of his free throws over the course of his career. Yet, in the 1961-62 season using the underhand technique Barry worked with Chamberlain and subsequently he shot a career best 61% from the free throw line and in the game which he scored 100 points he made 28 of 32 free throws. Yet, Chamberlain reverted back to the more conventional style of shooting and his free throw percentage plummeted. So why didn't he continue to shoot underhand? Because, as he stated, he felt like a "sissy." Shooting the ball overhand was the way to do it in the eyes of public opinion and the more unorthodox way Barry used just wasn't viewed at the time as a "manly" way to shoot the ball. Even today's players simply can't see past the stigma and long held belief this was the only way to shoot a basketball. Perhaps if he and more players could open their minds to this new understanding they could drastically improve their free throw percentage helping their team win games and opening them up to being a better all-around player.

Which brings us to our gospel passage this morning so many years before the game of basketball was ever invented. Yet a healing story in Luke's gospel; however, it is so much more than simply a healing. This story is about seeing. It's about God's

vision as revealed through the lenses of Jesus Christ. It's about the vision of God's kingdom, which is coming to fruition right before the eyes of the people through Jesus' teaching, healing, and other miracles he is performing. It's about opening eyes, minds, and new understandings of who God is. It's about looking past long held religious beliefs which have left some standing on the outside and others simply unable to comprehend who Jesus is because their minds are unable to stretch beyond the portrait etched in them of the coming Messiah. They can't see Jesus for who he is because they have already put him in a box.

Yet, Jesus saw. As verse 12 states, "Jesus saw her." She would have been so easy to miss given her back was bent and twisted leaving her staring at the floor. Certainly, it would have been near impossible to see her among the crowd; but, Jesus saw her. And he frees her from this ailment which has caused her such great distress and held her seemingly in captivity due that which Satan (v.16) had bound her with for 18 long years. And perhaps that's part of the vision the eyes of the people needed to see in Jesus' day and we continually need to see in our own time. While we can't always understand how God works perhaps as Jesus tells us there is a power in the world which is constantly at work thwarting God's plan, which in this text and throughout Jesus' life and ministry is all about new life, about being freed from those things that bind us, about redemption and returning to full relationship with our Creator, about justice, mercy, compassion, love and forgiveness.

Jesus heals this woman not just physically but he also gives her the ability to see the world with new eyes as she now is able to peer out into the world instead of simply at the ground. He also more than likely restores her to a proper place in the community as her ailment very well may have kept her out of some circles. Yet, not all had the eyes to grasp what Jesus was doing on this day of Sabbath rest. The leader of the synagogue, we are told, was indignant because Jesus cured on the Sabbath instead of waiting to the next day. One can't fault him all that much as he was doing his best to uphold the law given by God. He was faithfully trying to lead the people of God. This woman had been bound for 18 years, what was one more day? We certainly agree today that most laws are good and provide security, stability, and order. Yet, sometimes the way of doing things as they have always been done can limit our ability to perceive the in-breaking of God doing something new. In the book, *Prayer a Primer* by Henry French (Augsburg Books, 2009), which a group has been reading and discussing on Thursday evenings, it is what the author deems "beginner's mind." Essentially beginner's mind is letting go of what we already "know" in order to learn what we don't know. It's an "open mind, fresh and enthusiastic, with a deep sense of possibilities unfolding." (pp.16-17) With regards to prayer he paints the portrait of a woman who simply couldn't get beyond her preconceptions of what prayer is and thus her mind was burdened and "closed by opinions, beliefs, and biases that had been formed without the benefit of her own

experience.” (p.17) Her inability to see that prayer could be so much more limited her growth spiritually and open her up to a path into the mystery and presence of God.

In many ways, I think that is what has happened to this religious leader and to so many of us still today. We can't see beyond those beliefs, embedded theologies, opinions and biases we cling to for control, stability, security and comfort that we ultimately and perhaps unconsciously limit our vision of seeing God's activity in the world. The religious leader, shaped by a way things had always been done and trying to uphold the law, failed to recall just what the Sabbath was given for in the Exodus account. It was a gift. It was a day of rest as the people had been slaves in Egypt for so many years and worked tirelessly day in and day out under oppressive hands. Yet, it was also a gift to recall God's freedom from this slavery and this bondage. It was a gift of God's healing, redeeming, and saving work. It was a gift of God's power to thwart the evil plan of the enemy from all those forces that keep us from God and from one another. This is what the religious leader failed to see. The Sabbath was a perfect time for Jesus to heal this woman. It was a perfect time to free her from the chains Satan had bound her with. It was a perfect time for her to see with new eyes. It was a perfect time for all those present to be opened up to see what God was doing in Jesus.

What is it that we need to approach with a “beginner's mind?” What is it we need to be opened to in order to more fully grow spiritually and experience the mystery, grace, and presence of God?

