



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus said, 'Woman you are set free from your ailment.'

St Luke 13. 10-17

Sunday 24 August

What could be wrong with this? Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, on the sabbath, when a crippled woman came in, and was healed by Jesus. In the eyes of the conservative Jews, this was very wrong: it was working on the sabbath, explicitly forbidden by the 10 Commandments. So the synagogue's leader argued with Jesus and told him what he was wrong. He chose the wrong person with whom to quibble about the Law. Jesus rebutted the charge, and named those who thought those who felt he shouldn't heal on the sabbath as hypocrites – his strongest word of condemnation. The result? His opponents were put to shame, and the crowd, all the others, rejoiced at the wonders Jesus was doing.

Too often even we can stick rigidly to the expected norms of our society without allowing our God-given love and compassion to kick in. Or else we hide behind our own interpretation or understanding of the Christian faith as a means of avoiding our duty, or else forcing others to do so to our benefit. The woman was 'set free' from her ailment; that is Jesus' work and mission – to set free and to liberate. Yet, although it may seem an odd suggestion, sometimes captivity seems preferable. And again, odd though it may seem, sometimes it is the observance of religion which is that from which we need to be delivered.

- Can religion enslave?
- Is it easier to follow the rules than live the life?
- Do you ever use your faith as an excuse?
- How prepared are you to be challenged by new ideas of thinking?
- Why do or don't you go to Church?

The Jewish leaders had got it easy. They would interpret the Law and live it by the letter, rather than by the spirit. They were quick enough to condemn others, but often failed to see that they were not practising what they preached. No wonder Jesus used the image of motes and beams – Jewish leaders would rigorously point out the specks in others' eyes, ignoring, or oblivious to, the planks in their own. No wonder again that Jesus accused them of laying heavy burdens on others yet didn't offer to share – whereas Jesus himself did: 'Come to me all you are laden, and I will give you rest.'

- Are you sure you're not a hypocrite yourself?
- What is the difference between a lived faith and an acted one?
- Do you see the commands and teachings of Jesus as liberating or burdensome?
- How quick are you to criticise others?
- What is it to 'rejoice' – as did the crowds – at all the wonderful things [Jesus] was doing?

In a prayer used daily by the priests of the Society of the Holy Cross, is the request that 'what we believe in our hearts, we may show forth in our lives.' Jesus is not condemning people for a mistaken, slavish, following of the Law, but rather showing a way to use the Law as a means of being liberated, freed. From what? A stock answer would be from the bonds of sin, but that is resorting to words rather than action. The Christian faith is a faith of direct action, not theological principal. It is a means by which we can bring about peace and justice in our society and world, as well as joy and fulfilment in our own lives. What sort of Christian faith do you follow – or reject?