

Sermon for Sunday – August 21, 2022  
Luke 13:10-17

**Prayer:** May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable you O God, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

I probably shouldn't tell you this, but it happened one evening – I was living in Wynyard at the time. One evening when the television got boring; I begin to feel remorse about my behavior at the grocery store earlier in the day. I had resisted buying ice cream, and now I needed it. So, I threw on a pair of sweats, and a bunny hug and I made a run to the grocery store to get something that had chocolate in it. I headed, with determination, to the dairy aisle only to swing around the corner and see, at the end of the aisle - that one person – that is always ready to tell me everything that's happened in his life that day. He's bending over staring into the freezer section, obviously making a late-night visit for the same reason. I stopped dead in my tracks, pulled up the hood on my bunny hug, and made a slow turn so that I could hide behind a shelf yet still able to see around the corner to check and see if he's still there. My goal: Get what I need and get out without being seen. But if I do get seen, I'll be ready - I will look up and say, "Oh, I didn't see you there." Please tell me I'm not the only one who has done such a thing?

After two and a half years of Covid - have you noticed how good most of us are at looking away? We do it in the grocery store, we do it when we pass the homeless on the street, we do it with the visitor sitting next to us in church. We can even catch another's eye across a room or in a public place and look away so quickly that we pretend it never happened. We even do it in our own homes and with the people that we know the best and

love the most. A lot of us have gotten so good at this that we really can genuinely say, "Oh, I didn't see you there." And a lot of us know the flip side of it too. We want to disappear, not be seen, because we're ashamed of what we think others might see in us if they look in our eyes.

Looking at the ground – or perhaps looking at our phones - becomes a way of life. The struggle is that we know that if we return a glance or a gaze, something, that requires our presence, is going to happen. When our eyes lock, we'll be asked to bring ourselves outward. **The gaze is, I think, the beginning of community.** We have to bring ourselves out, and we have to let the other in. And sometimes life is a lot easier, a lot less complicated, a whole lot safer - not being in community. But is it really?

Let us consider our lesson today. We don't know much about the woman in the story, from Luke's Gospel, except that she was present when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. She had been bent over by a spirit for 18 years, forced to look at the ground as she went through life. She would have been one of those people who would be easy to pass by, or maybe easy to stare at. We could look at the curvature of her spine without the risk of catching her eye, even feeling good about ourselves because we feel sorry for her // 'that poor old woman'. You know, even worse than being unseen is being observed or watched or analyzed. I wonder what the people were thinking that day – as the woman made her way through the crowd.

Jesus saw her. But he didn't just *watch* her. He didn't continue with his teaching. He really **saw** her. Jesus saw her and moved to raise her up by laying his hands on her. The story tells us, she straightens up, and you can almost imagine their eyes meeting. Can you imagine gazing into Jesus

eyes - I imagine it to be the kind of gaze that goes directly to the heart. How she must have marvelled in being seen, apart from her burdensome spirit, no longer that old, bent-over woman - but now one known by Jesus. Eye to eye, person to person, participants in the life of God. And she sees - she sees God right in front of her.

I wonder if this moment of healing for the woman, was a moment of healing for Jesus, too, a moment when his teaching was raised up and made visible so that those gathered to hear him could now see the power of **God's loving gaze**. She was the one through which God's power was made evident on that day. When Jesus looked into her eyes, he must have seen God too. In the meeting of these two, the mystery of God surged into the world for all to see.

The woman would walk away upright, and Jesus would now go on to Jerusalem, no doubt with a little more courage, that God would see him in his suffering as well. God would bring life to a bent-over beloved one. God would not avert the divine eyes from suffering. In the gaze of God, we can see exactly where we are going.

Friends, we are nearing the end of the summer. Some of us have already returned from vacations, some are back to school this week. We begin the routine of the fall very soon. I hope that we have been able to experience the loving gaze of Jesus, who yearns to meet our eyes and to raise us up this summer. Perhaps you have experienced that loving gaze through that of a grandchild, a friend, a kind stranger. Perhaps someone has seen that loving gaze in you. Friends it is when we look and when we are willing to be seen that this gaze transforms us and them. This seeing and being seen in community is not only transformative but it is abundant living.

It is living in this gaze that we find the power and the courage to really see. There is no doubt in my mind that the world these days cries out to be seen and healed. Just before I sat down to write this sermon I listened to CBC radio.

Aid worker Samira Sayed Rahman was in eastern Afghanistan recently, where she met a woman struggling to survive in a one-room mud structure that she shared with her six children.

If she is able to get food on the table, it is because she's picked from the garbage. And if she can get enough of the hair and dirt off the food, she brings it home for her six children. "Otherwise [they] go days without eating

Sayed Rahman said this story of deprivation is the story of millions of Afghans, who are having to resort to "horrific means to survive" since the Taliban's resurgence in the country sparked a humanitarian crisis. And she added that it's fuelled by an economic crisis that "is a direct result of the decisions of the international community."

Afghans are resorting to "skipping meals, taking on debt, pulling children out of school — and ... extreme measures, such as selling daughters into marriage or selling organs,"

The UN estimates that of Afghanistan's population of 38 million, roughly [25 million people are living in poverty](#), are in need of humanitarian assistance. That number has risen from [14 million in July 2021](#), just before the Taliban's takeover.

Some countries have created exceptions to their laws, to allow the delivery of aid to ordinary Afghans — but Canada's strict policies remain in place. Aid organizations in Afghanistan, that are heavily dependent on Canadian foreign aid are now struggling," said Sayed Rahman, adding that policies intended to "isolate the Taliban" have instead "punished the Afghan

people." "We are punishing 38 million people just because a few hundred are in power.

Can we stop and see this Afghan woman? Can we allow her gaze to catch ours in such a way that we would both be changed and raised up?

I suppose that's the question that gets posed in our Gospel text for today: "Having been seen by God, will we now see?" Whether it be the world's most profound humanitarian needs or the one coming down the aisle of the grocery store, will we see?

And I know "seeing and being seen" is hard. It's really hard. There are so many spirits that curve us. Yet, it is in these faces that come before us that we will find the face of Jesus. I believe healing is unleashed in the world when we dare to look into one another's eyes and see as Jesus saw. In that movement to look and to see, we find ourselves freed.

I pray God will make us into a community that unleashes healing into the whole world and that we might never stop seeing each other and allowing ourselves to be seen.

Amen.