

**A Sermon Preached  
at  
St. George's Madrid  
by  
The Reverend Canon John W. Kilgore, M.D.  
25 August 2019  
X Trinity Proper 16 Year C  
Jeremiah 1: 4-10  
Psalm 71: 1-6  
Hebrews 12: 18-29  
Like 13: 10-017**

***And the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things he was doing.***

Have you ever seen someone who was totally bent over? I mean their back is curved like a C. And all they can look at is the floor. There is a medical condition called kyphosis. It tends to be an aging thing where the spine, and the discs, those spaces between the vertebrae, and the vertebrae themselves, actually, collapse on the front and a person becomes progressively bent over. Sometimes only able to look at the floor. My former and beloved Bishop Hays Rockwell is like that, very very stooped. Usually it is an age related malady, often due to arthritis. But some people are born with it or have other medical conditions causing it. Imagine only being able to look at the floor when upright. Can't see the faces of friends and acquaintances, and those one meets... And it is immediately noticed when you meet someone. They appear different. And are probably treated differently.

Yesterday I read an interesting article in the *New York Times* about encountering 'someone different.' It is titled, 'What Different-Looking People Would Like You to Know Before You Stare.' The article begins, "A little boy sees a bald man in the store. 'Mommy look! That man has no hair!' he says. His mother grabs his arm and whispers urgently: 'Be quiet! He might hear you!' The boy looks at his mother, puzzled. 'Doesn't he *know*?' " The article goes on to describe people with various physical conditions and maladies; and interviews them to learn how we should interact with them. What *they* say... Essentially it suggests that we treat anyone 'different' normally. As if they are a full human being. Don't stare at them, don't look away and avoid eye contact, don't turn around and observe them after they pass. They know they are different. And are used to being looked at. They just want, need, to be treated as a normal person. Don't mention that someone is 6'7" and say oh you must be good at basketball. Or make jokes trying to put someone at ease in their wheelchair, or with their cane or walker. Look them in the eye, don't look away. But don't stare. One 'different' person says, "Just smile to let me know that you have no ill will, and move on. Please, for the love, don't keep staring. That's super weird." But also don't ignore them. Treat them as a full human being. The tall guy says, "Greet me as if I'm 5'6!" And don't offer to help those who are mobility limited. "In general people with disabilities know their limits and will ask for assistance if needed." Don't pet their service animals. And do let your kids be curious. One woman wrote, "Please don't ever drag your child away, or try to pretend we aren't there. That's very hurtful. A simple hello or 'Yes! Can you say hi?' is as far as it needs to go."

I have a longstanding and good friend who is an achondroplastic dwarf, a midget. Now, about 70 years old, he was 'normal' until he was about 9 years old when his long bones quite growing. He's about 4' tall, and looks different. People with his malady were the munchkins in the Wizard of Oz. He is very good at making jokes, trying to put people at ease. But I let **him** do that. Not me. Or others. The article I mentioned ends with the quote, "We're people first, just like anyone else."

So Jesus knows that and is always counseling us to treat everyone as a child of God. Everyone equally. We are made in the image of God scripture tells us. Does that mean that God has deformities, is stooped over, unusually shaped? Has a C-shaped spine? Perhaps. Worth considering... The Apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh. We don't know what it was but it has been conjectured that he had a physical deformity, perhaps a limp, or was gay. We don't know.

So this woman in the gospel reading today was bent over and unable to stand upright, crippled for eighteen years. And like so many others Jesus healed, the blind man given sight, the deaf man suddenly able to hear, the mute whose tongue was released, Jesus heals her. Restores her health. So why would the leaders of the synagogue take issue with that? With healing someone! Because of the rules. Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. In the Jewish Torah, book of the Law, there are 613 Commandments, or *Mitzvah*, to be observed. Many faith traditions, and I have full respect for all of them, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, have various levels of adherence to strict admonitions in holy scripture. Orthodox Jews don't eat shellfish and keep the dairy and meat products separate in individual kitchens. Muslims don't eat pork, and orthodox women don't show their bodies; during Ramadan they fast sun up to sundown. Hindus don't eat beef; and there are various Christian proscriptions.

Christian Scientists won't see a doctor but just pray; Church of God don't believe in using any musical instruments focusing on one line of scripture that says you only use your voice to praise God, no musical instruments; Seventh Day Adventists insisting that only worshiping on Saturday counts. The Amish won't use any mechanical devices. I once had a nurse at the hospital come up to me, knowing I was a doctor and priest, inquiring, during Lent, from her Roman Catholic perspective, what our exact Anglican rules for Lenten fasting were — could we eat only fish; just on Fridays; could we have meat on Sundays; could we take communion without fasting and if so for how many hours; did we have to confess it if we forgot and ate meat on Friday; on and on.

I explained to her, or tried, that our Anglican tradition is founded on a three legged stool of scripture, tradition, and reason. And that we try to balance those three. While scripture is very important and our guide, and Godly inspired, we don't take scripture literally and don't parse every sentence or phrase. After all they have been translated and recopied how many times. And right after Jesus, for seventy years or so, the tradition was only oral, wasn't written down till at least one generation after Jesus lived. While very important, and our guide, we Anglicans don't focus on that level of detail in scripture. Second, is tradition, the history of practices of the Church, particularly our observance of the sacraments — Baptism, Holy Eucharist, Unction or Healing, Confession and Absolution, Confirmation, Marriage, Ordination. The Church practices over the years and centuries inform our beliefs. And third is reason. It all has to make sense and fit with our God given reason and judgment. We say that we don't have to check our minds at the door! We don't ascribe to things that are totally at odds with reason. The earth wasn't created in seven days, there was an ark big enough to hold a pair of every living animal.

For Jesus teaches us that what matters is where our heart is. How our 'being' is inclined toward God and we toward one another. And with that we begin our celebration of the Holy Eucharist; with the Summary of the Law. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this: Love your neighbour as yourself. We go on to say, There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. And Jesus' teachings.

Jesus teaches us that over and over. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God. Seek first his kingdom and it will be given to you. Over and over Jesus teaches us that it is about how are hearts are inclined toward God. And that is counsel for meeting and interacting with God, and with each other. Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and Love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus doesn't sweat the small stuff. Doesn't fret over all the rules, the 613 *Mitzvah*. He rather teaches us the big principles. And we Anglicans live by that. Not by the minor rules. Scripture, reason and tradition — the Anglican Way. And for that we say thanks be to God. No wonder the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things he was doing.

Amen.