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Luke 13:10-17
Beyond Resistance

Last week we dealt with a very challenging text about Jesus knowing he brings division to the earth, knowing that his message is challenging. This week we have a bit of a different angle on Jesus' challenging message and what lies beyond human resistance to it.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus.

Um

My reflection this morning could also be more appropriately named the gospel according to C.S. Lewis. Early in the week I was reading a commentary and was captivated by a reference to Lewis' *The Great Divorce* . . . it's the story of a busload of people from hell, who go to heaven on holiday . . . or perhaps more like purgatory. The beings who get off the bus find themselves in a ghost-like state and struggle to interact with the world around them. Blades of grass are solid like diamonds and after trying like mad to pick a little daisy by twisting and tugging, he found his fingers lost most of their skin instead.¹ There were also bright people, radiating with the light of eternity – their faces ageless, with heavy thought in the face of an infant, and frolic of childhood in the face of the elderly.² And there were pure spirits and angels around the endlessly grassy landscape. From time to time the narrator would find a ghost person interacting with an angel or spirit, as well as light beings who were obviously friends or family from their time on earth.

A couple of bright people approached a ghostly woman, whose fine clothing looked ghastly in the eternal light. She squealed in disgust as they tried to help, saying, “do you really suppose I'm going out

¹ CS Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

² CS Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

there among all those people, like this . . . among people with real solid bodies? . . . and have everyone staring through me.”

The bright person responded, “Oh, I see. But we’re all a bit ghostly when we first arrive, you know. That’ll wear off. Just come out and try.”

“But they’ll see me . . . I’d rather die . . . I wish I’d never been born,” the ghostly woman said, “What are we born for?”

“For infinite happiness,” said the bright one, “You can step out into it at any moment . . . an hour hence and you will not care. A day hence and you will laugh at it.”

The ghostly woman almost mustered up enough courage to come out of the shadows, but suddenly cried out, “No, I can’t. I tell you I can’t . . . it’s disgusting. I should never forgive myself if I did. Never, never.”³ We root for her to find the courage to step out of her misery into the light of eternity and life . . . at the same time we know what it is to be stuck in a given circumstance without a way out. Every option seems impossible, unthinkable, disgusting . . . unforgivable.

We don’t know much about the woman Jesus heals in this morning’s gospel story. She is a woman named for her ailment, the inability to stand tall for 18 years, and otherwise has no back-story. While the NRSV translates her affliction as “a spirit that had crippled her,” many others translate it as, “a spirit of weakness.”⁴ Which according to NT Wright, could just mean she had an unknown illness that the doctors could not discern,⁵ but it’s also an interesting metaphor for something deeper that could be acting on her.

When Jesus heals her, he is obviously doing it not only to transform her pain and restore her life, Jesus is using this as an example for all of creation. Jesus comes to challenge the world we have manufactured and clear our eyes to the **reality of God** that is all around us.

³ Ibid.

⁴ NT Wright, Luke for Everyone, 164.

⁵ Ibid, 165.

The narrator of our tour through heaven asks his teacher, “Are those people right who say that Heaven and Hell are only states of mind?” His teacher replies, indeed hell is a state of mind – nothing could be more true. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakable remains.⁶ Power can go, oppression, illness, isolation, lies, these BS rules that keep people under control, etc . . . all of them can go. But also things we can’t imagine are non-essentials, things that are near and dear to us, things we construct our lives around can also go. What remains is love, God’s love, that unshakable reality that is the source of our life.

Beyond our resistance to God’s initiating presence in our lives, beyond the lies we live, beyond Jesus poking us . . . beyond the moments where God says, ok, your will be done . . . beyond the suffering those things cause us, is reality itself. Again, we need to use our imaginations to connect with the experience of the woman with a weak spirit before her chance meeting with Jesus. Only upon reflecting on our own struggles can we imagine hers, or how she came to find herself unable to stand straight for 18 years . . . I imagine her resigned to this reality. I imagine her not fighting, not resisting, but resigned to this continuing reality . . . like those who decide to return to hell after their tour.

The journey back to hell requires them to find what appears to be a small crack in the expansive green pastures of the realm of the kingdom, and to travel back in a shrinking coach that crushes passengers into insufferably cramped quarters until they themselves grow small enough to have wide spaces between them.⁷ I wonder if the woman who was healed also made herself small to fit her circumstance.

According to CS Lewis, ordinary light beings are incapable of making themselves small enough to fit into the crack that leads back to hell. It is only Christ who can become small enough to meet us in our hell and help us embrace the expansiveness, the love and embrace that was always here for us.⁸

⁶ CS Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

⁷ Charles Raynal in *Feasting on the Word*, year C, vol 3, p. 386.

⁸ CS Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

Jesus says to the woman, this is not the life God has in mind for you, “you are set free.” In fact, this is not what God has in mind for any of us . . .

(read “God of My Life”)

God, we pray that we would not push you away when you come with a healing touch. We pray that we might trust in you and have courage to make you the centre of our lives and be transformed. And though we may fear a world expanded, fear being seen or having no remaining reason why we can't fully live, give us the faith that on the other side, we will be grateful. Thanks be to God.