

Noticed – Luke 13:10-17

Rev. Matt Nieman

August 24, 2025

With school starting this time of year, millions of kids are entering back into the nation's schools and beginning a new journey. Some of them will find their way quite easily. They'll stand out for their academic prowess, or their engaging personality, or their mischief, or their musical or athletic ability, or their provocative dress.

People will know them.

Other kids, though, will not stand out. They'll sit in the back of the room, in silence. Their personalities won't make waves, their performance in the classroom will be non-descript. Their social connections will be weak, their talents hidden from the rest of the class or even the entire school.

Worse than that is the culture of shame that many kids will once again find themselves in at school—often these days due to the influence of social media.

[Andy] Crouch wrote in *Christianity Today* a decade ago [in "The Return of Shame," *Christianity Today*, March 10, 2015] that *the omnipresence of social media has created a new sort of shame culture. The world of Facebook, Instagram and the rest is a world of constant display and observation. The desire to be embraced and praised by the community is intense. People dread being exiled and condemned. Moral life is not built on the continuum of right and wrong; it's built on the continuum of inclusion and exclusion. ...*

... Everybody is perpetually insecure in a moral system based on inclusion and exclusion. There are no permanent standards, just the shifting judgment of the crowd. It is a culture of oversensitivity,

overreaction and frequent moral panics, during which everybody feels compelled to go along.

That was written a decade ago. And from what we hear, not much has changed in a decade. Social media can take those kids, for example, who don't get noticed at school and give them the kind of attention they don't want—ridicule, embarrassment, ostracizing, isolation, and exclusion.

This all came to mind this week as I was reading this account of Jesus and the disabled woman.

She had a chronic disability in a time and place when a significant percentage of religious people associated her disability with God's judgment. She had done something wrong, in their eyes, to earn God's punishment.

Before we get judgy about them back then, consider the fact that some 2,000 years later, there are those who still tend to blame someone for the misfortune they've encountered but had nothing to do with—whether it's illness or some sort of unforeseen financial hardship, or relationship breakdowns.

"God had it out for them," goes the theory. That belief and theology are unhelpful.

A couple more factors were working against this woman in our story besides the stigma of her illness. First, she's a woman and treated unequally by the patriarchal society she's living in. Second, she must have been in great pain to have stood and walked stooped over like she was for the prior eighteen years. Who knows for sure what her condition was, but she likely was in great discomfort.

So, the stigma of being disabled, the stigma of being a woman in a male-dominated society, and her physical suffering

made for a lifetime of being unseen by her peers or, worse, ostracized for nothing she was able to control.

There was one person in her presence that day who saw her differently, one person who saw beyond the stigma of her illness and gender, one person who noticed her for her humanity.

Jesus did two incredible and loving things this day: he noticed this otherwise forgotten woman, and he healed her.

Jesus encounters her after concluding his Sabbath teaching. (verse 12: “When Jesus saw her...”) Women were not permitted inside the sanctuary of the synagogue at that time, so he had to seek her out and break with custom. According to New Testament commentator James R. Edwards, “People with physical deformities were expected to remain socially invisible, especially if they were women. Women rarely if ever approached rabbis, nor did rabbis as a rule speak to women.”¹

Jesus saw this woman when evidently nobody else did or was willing to. And that’s no different today than it was then. Jesus sees everyone. He sees the teenager who struggles to make friends at school, the man on the street who has struggled in and out of housing, the widow who can’t make ends meet, the family going through a crisis.

Jesus sees the ones who don’t make the news for their shiny new things, but instead make the news because of their mistakes—sometimes what society would call fatal mistakes. He sees them.

Within the context of faith and church, there are people who unfortunately some congregations don’t notice. Sure, it relates to their appearance or their hardships maybe. But churches also have this tendency to not notice those whose faiths aren’t on par with the majority, those whose faith journeys haven’t followed

the linear progress from brand new to fully mature over their lifetimes, those whose faiths have taken detours due to the spiritual damage they've incurred from being told by others in faith that they're faith isn't good enough or orthodox enough.

Churches sometimes don't see these brothers or sisters. They don't allow for conversations made up of just listening and asking questions, conversations that might therefore lead to deepening relationships within a group or with God.

Our hope here at FPC is that we continue to notice everyone no matter where they are in this journey with God. Our expanded offerings of study groups (we're calling them Quest or Re-Quest groups) whether on Sunday morning or in small groups away from Sunday are tools we hope will provide the settings that foster this noticing process.

That everyone who comes into our midst may know we see them wherever they are on their journey, that is our goal—so that they know they aren't invisible, and, therefore, that they know Jesus sees them, too.

Not only did Jesus see this suffering woman in Luke 13, he did something for her. He healed her of ailment.

Jesus laid his hands on her to heal her. He also offered her words of life: "Woman, you are set free from your ailment," he declares (verse 12). Through words and acts of healing, he sets her free. It's a pattern with Jesus: Jesus sees her, calls her, lays hands on her, speaks to her, and frees her.

And while we know Jesus doesn't heal every disease or injury today, his action toward us is more than just seeing. His noticing includes meeting us where we are, taking interest in us no matter our ailment, and setting us free of the stigmas others have placed on us.

Jesus doesn't abide by the barriers others would put upon him. It doesn't matter the time of day or day of the week...or the location or the crowd around him. He sees, acts, he notices, regardless.

The synagogue leader was incredulous that Jesus would perform such a healing act on the Sabbath. Evidently, the transformative love of Jesus was not to be displayed on this day. Law and tradition, well, that was to take precedent.

Jesus' retort, including the reality that oxen and donkeys were led to water on the Sabbath of all days (!) left the leader and his colleagues put to shame. If such a simple chore was allowed, certainly the transformation of a woman's life was appropriate.

Whether it's the Sabbath or any other day of the week, God's work of noticing others, often through our own words and actions, is welcome and necessary.

Because Jesus' noticing is all about his grace. And that grace is unmatched.

Richard Rohr, the Franciscan priest and author wrote of it this way:

"Grace cannot be understood by any ledger of merits and demerits. It cannot be held to any patterns of buying, losing, earning, achieving or manipulating, which is where, unfortunately, most of us live our lives. Grace is, quite literally, "for the taking." It is God eternally giving away God -- for nothing -- except the giving itself. Quite simply, to experience grace, you must stop all counting!

"The ego does not know how to receive things freely or without logic. It prefers a worldview of scarcity, or at least *quid pro quo*, where only the clever win. It likes to be worthy and needs to understand in order to be able to accept things. That problem,

and its overcoming, is at the very center of the gospel plot line. It has always been overcome from God's side. The only problem is getting us in on the process! That full inclusion of us (including the woman crippled in body and spirit) is the greatest testimony to God's humility, mercy and love."

Jesus sees, notices, and changes us.