

Whatever else Covid lockdown and restrictions in France have meant to us in the last two years, most of us were stopped in our tracks and had to rethink our priorities.

What have we learned from the loss of loved ones, enforced isolation within families, or from friends and neighbours -and major changes in our social interaction? Then, after months of restrictions, we found ourselves free to determine our own agendas again.

I wonder what has changed in our own priorities and lifestyles.

So, in today's reading from Luke's Gospel, perhaps we can identify with the woman who hobbles in to the temple, bent double and her eyes to the ground. She's had this difficulty, not for months- but for 18 years ! What a nightmare this period must have been. In addition to the physical effects of her illness, her self-confidence and self-esteem have probably been knocked by the judgmental attitudes of others, so that perhaps she now also looks down to avoid eye contact?

Whatever her back-story might be, the woman's condition will have pushed her to the margins, both of society and perhaps also of the synagogue. But despite so many years of suffering, she has taken the initiative to come to the synagogue today, desperate for something to give her hope. She arrives at the moment when Jesus is in full flow.

Luke doesn't tell us whether she was noticed by the crowd, or by any synagogue official. But Jesus notices her! It seems that he doesn't wait to finish his sermon, his paragraph, or even his sentence! .

We're told Jesus calls her over and simply says, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment". When called forward, what does the woman do?

She moves readily from the shadows into the light, and welcomes the gift of Jesus's hands being laid upon her. All eyes are now on her. Luke tells us that she *immediately* stands up straight. We can almost feel her relief!

Jesus's action has restored both her stature and her dignity. No longer need she be talked over, or ignored. Her whole outlook on life has been changed, and now, instead of worshipping God with her eyes to the floor, she praiseshim with her head held high.

But this is not the end of the story. A debate follows. The synagogue official, a righteous man anxious to be seen to keep good order, is very ill at ease. People shouldn't expect to be healed on the Sabbath, he says! Healing was considered to be the work of a physician, a doctor, and work on the Sabbath was forbidden.

This woman, he implies, could surely have waited until the following day, or later in the week, to be healed. But Jesus reminds the crowd that an act of healing on the Sabbath is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the law. Now is always the time to put things right.

Today's Gospel, reminds us that the reign of God, made known through Jesus, is for today. We are urged to stand alongside the woman and everyone like her, seeing the world through their eyes, and making it our priority to follow Jesus's example.

Many of us know how easy it can be to put off essential actions, like saying sorry, or mending a broken relationship. We can each be expert at ignoring cries for racial justice or at making excuses for lack of action over climate change.

In our own daily lives, its very easy to become bound by rules and regulations or to hide behind them, so perhaps we can spare some sympathy, too, for the synagogue official, when he feels the Sabbath should be kept as it had always been kept. We get stuck in routines -watching television, playing sport, stuck in front of a computer, - all out of habit.

We convince ourselves that we have little or no free time, yet often its because we have bound ourselves to certain patterns of behaviour. During the Covid emergency, many people have been asking themselves whether these practices are still appropriate. So how about letting Jesus have more influence in our own lives. Let's risk breaking some of our routines by making more space in our lives for him..

The woman Jesus healed in the temple had been looking at her own feet for 18 years, but Jesus's intervention enabled her immediately to look straight ahead. Her illness had made her look in on herself, now she could look others in the face, and change her pattern of behaviour. She was truly grateful and praised God.

Perhaps, like this woman, we need to look at our own feet and check they're pointing in the right direction. Maybe we, too, having checked our feet, need to stand up, look straight ahead and act immediately. No wasting time. In God's eyes, the time is always ripe to do the right thing, focussed on the needs of others.

As in today's Gospel, Jesus invites us to come close and spend time with him. As we praise God this morning, is there anything he's asking us to do, to change, to put right or to move on? The woman in the temple responded to the call of Jesus and her life was immediately changed. Let us, too, praise our Lord for all he's done for us, and allow him to change and re-focus our lives today.