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Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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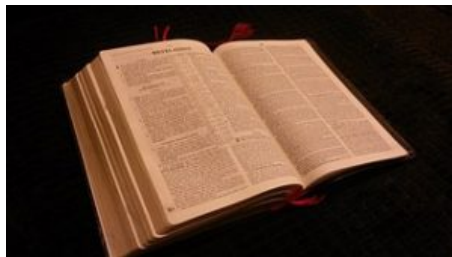


Reflection on the Bent Woman

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on DECEMBER 5, 2016

One of my favorite gospel stories is Jesus' cure of the bent woman on the Sabbath. It is found in Luke 13:10-17. The story is brief, but it speaks volumes about freedom and compassion and how we partner with God in the plan of salvation.

The story begins with this sentence: **Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath.** I guess you could say that Jesus is a "guest speaker." He's pretty popular right now so he's probably drawn a sizable crowd. The synagogue leader would be pleased by the turnout. After all, the size of a congregation reflects well on the leader of the synagogue, church, or mosque, right?



Then Luke tells us **a woman was there.** For eighteen years she had been **crippled by a spirit.** She was **bent over, completely incapable of standing erect.** We don't know the woman's name. I wonder, did the other people know her name? Was she Elizabeth or Rachel to them? Or did they know her simply as the

"bent woman" or "the cripple." Don't we sometimes reduce people to a label: the widow, the homeless man, the wild teenager, the flaming liberal, the old fogey, the drunk, the pervert? What was the nature of her infirmity? Osteoarthritis? Tuberculosis of the spine? An injury due to some devastating trauma? The phrase "crippled by a spirit" doesn't necessarily imply some sort of demonic possession. All kinds of "spirits" can cripple us. We might ask: what bends me over? My job, worries, the loss of a loved one, fears for the future, loneliness, ill health, the aging process?

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

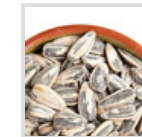
Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend,
poet, farm girl.



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Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality— the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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Jesus sees the woman. He notices her. Now remember, in the synagogue in those days, the men were in the front and the women were in the back. Complete segregation. Yet, Jesus looks past all the men and focuses on this woman among all the other women. I suspect one or more of those women must have tended to her. How else would she have been able to get to the synagogue in the first place?

And what does Jesus do? He calls to her. Did he know her name? How did she know he was calling her and not someone else? She was so bent over she couldn't even see Jesus. In fact, she didn't see anyone anymore. All she saw were peoples' feet! Yet, somehow she knew he was calling her. And she went to him. This means she had to shuffle through all those men to get to Jesus. What courage this took! What humility too—for all eyes were now upon her! And when you are self-conscious because of your looks, the last thing you want is to be the center of attention.



Then Jesus lays his hands upon her and says, **Woman, you are set free of your infirmity.** He touches her despite the cultural restrictions of his day that would frown upon this action. His words and touch give her not power or prestige, but freedom! And dignity! She slowly begins to stand up straight. For the first time in years she is looking someone in the face. And the face is Jesus'. And what is the first thing she does with her new-found freedom? She gives glory to God! Despite her years of suffering, she knows how to give thanks to God!

We know what happens next. The people are amazed at what they have just witnessed. But the leader of the synagogue is **indignant that Jesus had cured on the Sabbath.** But he doesn't confront Jesus directly. Instead he scolds the woman and his congregation: **"There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the Sabbath day."** In other words, when faced with a mystery he cannot explain, he resorts to enforcing the rules—which he knows so well: "You picked the wrong day... Come back during regular office hours!" We might ask ourselves, do we ever let the inexplicable restrict our compassion?

Jesus gets angry. He yells: **Hypocrites!** And he reveals the inanity of the leader's remark. Common sense says you untie your ox or ass on the Sabbath and lead it to water. **This daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years now,**

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ought she not to have been set free on the Sabbath day from this bondage? This woman is a Daughter of Abraham. She is one of us. She is a valuable member of the faith community. She has a role to play in God's plan of salvation.

Jesus restores the woman's dignity. He sets her free. He pronounces her beautiful.

Here is a song by MercyMe entitled "Beautiful." May we hear Jesus say these words to us today. And may we repeat them to someone who needs to hear them today.



What touches you about this gospel story?

Who or what bends you over? Who or what raises you up?

PS: My sister, Mary Ann Hartman, age 77, passed away last Saturday. She was the mother of five, a widow, a lover of nature, and an exceptionally kind and gentle woman of faith. She learned on the day before Thanksgiving that she had cancer. She had surgery but decided to discontinue any treatment. "It's all in God's hands," she said. "And I'm ready to die." She died a few days later with her family at her bedside. Someday I'll write a blog about Mary Ann, my only sister and my best friend. Please keep her and our family in your prayers. Thank you!

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Kathleen Magiera December 5, 2016 at 4:57 am



God bless you and your family Sr. Melannie with the loss of your sister. She sounds like she was God's instrument while on earth.

I am a special education teacher and I so can relate to this story about the woman who was bent over. Students with disabilities help us see things different because they have a different perspective. My life's work is to lift these children up.

Kathleen

REPLY

Mary Ries December 5, 2016 at 5:18 am



I am so sorry to hear of your sister's death. She sounds like a woman of deep faith. I too have only one sister and she too is my best friend. (and my only sibling). Over the years we have gotten so close; laughed, cried, prayed for each other and our families. And no one can make me laugh over the silliest things like she does. So please know that I will hold you in my heart today and remember you in my prayers.

REPLY

John Hopkins December 5, 2016 at 5:38 am



Dear Sister Melannie,

I echo what Kathleen says about the loss of Mary Ann, and I look forward to reading your words about her. My sister Zita is currently gravely ill and ask this beautiful blog community to keep her their prayers.

Loved your insightful commentary on this gospel passage, especially the part about how the men and women were segregated and how Jesus' touching the woman would have been considered shocking. For how many centuries have women been forced to bow to authority, a mostly male authority? But here Jesus is perhaps telling all women "to stand tall, you are not the blame of humanity's fall, pass through these hardened beliefs for it is you I call!"

John

REPLY

Doris December 5, 2016 at 9:45 am



Condolences, Sr. Melannie. Sisters are very special relationships.

REPLY

Carolyn Shalhoub December 5, 2016 at 10:03 am



Dear Sr Melanie,

I am so sorry to hear of the loss of your sister and in such a short time from her diagnosis. My only sibling and sister died four years ago of cancer, which she had off and on for 20 years but turned virulent the last six months. We were buddies too and the world is just not the same without her. I am praying for her and her family but especially for you.

Carolyn

REPLY

Theresa December 5, 2016 at 10:03 am



Dear Sister, You and your family will be in my prayers.

REPLY

Mary Schneider December 5, 2016 at 10:16 am



May your family find comfort in your grief. I am sure she is with God right now. I pray for all of you.

I like that you said "Jesus Noticed her" in today's reflection. I just recently read your short article "Notice what you notice."

REPLY

Joni Dugan December 5, 2016 at 10:27 am



Melanie, Thank you so much for this. I am so sorry about your loss. The death of a sibling is so hard. I am sure she must have been a beautiful woman. I just found out this morning that a good friend of mine died at 92 years old. I had gone to St. Louis to sit with her through the night and early morning a couple of days ago. She finally let go to go home to the Lord. So your song really touched me this morning. She was so beautiful both inside and out. We worked together in Fordsville, Ky years ago and she touched so many people just by being herself. So Melanie, thanks again for all you do and are!

REPLY

Beverly December 5, 2016 at 10:39 am



So sorry to hear of the loss of your sister. May God hold you in the palm of his hand and give you peace.

REPLY

Cathy December 5, 2016 at 10:45 am



Dear Sister Melannie, I was profoundly touched by this meditation and song. Your words and the song speak of the deep, personal, abiding love God has for us. Appropriate thoughts for this season of watching we call Advent. Reminds me to watch for his love in my world.

I know you watched his love in your relationship with your sister and she now experiences it firsthand. Prayers that you and your family be comforted.

REPLY

carol December 5, 2016 at 10:46 am



So sorry for your loss, may you find comfort in all your beautiful memories of Mary Ann. She and her family will be in my prayers.

REPLY

Bobbi December 5, 2016 at 10:48 am



I'm so sorry on the passing of your sister. Sisters are special friends. She lives on!

REPLY

Jackie Taxter December 5, 2016 at 11:07 am



Dear Sister, So sorry for the loss of your sister. God bless her. Your words on the reading this morning are so meaningful to me, thank you.

REPLY

Kathy Gartlan OFS December 5, 2016 at 11:15 am



I'm so sorry for news. I ask God to heal you and your family.

REPLY

Karen December 5, 2016 at 11:19 am



So sorry for your loss. Your sister is now present with you at all hours. Your gospel reflection is so very appropriate for our society today, isn't it? We still persecute those who speak truths. We still "miss the point" in so many ways by clinging to our accepted "rules" and "standards".

REPLY

Suzanne Sayer December 5, 2016 at 12:03 pm



So sorry for your loss. Praying for you and all your sister's family.

REPLY

Ann Schmid December 5, 2016 at 12:08 pm



You're beautiful in His sight ! Thank you for sharing. Please know of my prayers for your sister and all those so dear to her, especially you, Melannie.

REPLY

Barbara December 5, 2016 at 12:08 pm



My heartfelt sympathies on the loss of your sister, Sr. Melannie. I lost a sister many years ago and I know how difficult it is to lose a sibling. May the Lord comfort you and your family at this difficult time. You are in my thoughts and prayers. As always, this week's scripture reflection is very thought-provoking. Thank you for all the inspiration you share. I love your blog!

REPLY

Shirley December 5, 2016 at 12:18 pm



So sorry to hear of your sisters death. You and your family will be in our prayers.
Thank you Sister for this blog; I so enjoy it and look forward to it every Monday.

REPLY

Nona Higgins December 5, 2016 at 12:35 pm



My sympathy on the death of your sister. They are so special and dear to us. Thank you for sharing each Monday with us, dear sister.

REPLY

Jan December 5, 2016 at 1:20 pm



Dear Sister Melannie,

I so loved your interpretation of this gospel. My mom has passed, but she had polio as a child & had back pain all her life. By the time she was still a relatively

young mother she started to become bent over. She was totally bent over & in a lot of pain by the time she died. Yet she raised 5 children & was a very faithful Catholic (she converted to Catholicism). She was particularly faithful to the Blessed Mother.

The song today brought me to tears! My mom, like all handicapped adults & children, was beautiful. I know she was welcomed into heaven by Jesus with open arms. My parents loved to dance & I can picture them dancing frequently in heaven.

I will pray for your sister & family. I have lost 2 brothers that I still grieve for. I know that they too are in heaven with my parents. They were beautiful also.

REPLY

Gerry beckmann December 5, 2016 at 1:35 pm



I too am very sorry to learn of the death of your dear Sister. I am praying peace for you and all your family.

I have learned so much from the story of the "bent woman." I think when a scripture telling doesn't name a person, that for us to think about who that one might be in our awareness Then to read again the story placing in that name. I have recognized many bent people and know that at times I too have been bent. Please, all of us, look around and see the bent people .Ones who walk with shoulders rounded -with the weight of burdens they are carrying. Ones who don't seem to ever be looking up. Ones who find it difficult to experience Joy. Lord,Open our eyes, our ears, minds and hands to see the bent people .

REPLY

Jan December 5, 2016 at 2:14 pm



Dear Sister Melannie,
My sympathy to you and your family upon the loss of your sister Mary Ann. I will add this petition my church's prayer list for this week. Thank you so much for sharing your insights with beautiful music each week. I look forward to reading you every Monday.

REPLY

Mary December 5, 2016 at 3:23 pm



I join with many others in sending condolences to you, Sr Melanie. Sisters are special friends who are with us always who we will see when in God's good time.

I love your weekly meditations and am inspired by them—keep up your wonderful ministry!! Mary

REPLY

Helen Larkins December 5, 2016 at 3:59 pm



I remember meeting your sister when she was with you and you led a retreat at our parish, Espiritu Santo, in Safety Harbor, FL. Your sister was a lovely woman and I send my deepest sympathy for your loss. We will pray for her at mass at our parish.

I look forward your blog every Monday.

Blessings,

Helen

REPLY

Sister Roberta Brunner December 5, 2016 at 4:08 pm



Dear Melanie,

You and your sister Mary Ann and her family will be in my thoughts and prayers, it's not easy to lose an only sister. Somehow Jesus wanted her home for Christmas. With love, Roberta, OSF

REPLY

Sister Marietta Wethington, OSU December 5, 2016 at 4:11 pm



Sister Melannie,

Sisters are so special. What a loss you have experienced. I will remember Mary Ann and all your family in my prayers.

Loved your reflection on the bent over woman. I have scoliosis and am rather bent. So this is a favorite scripture of mine.

Blessings, gratitude and sympathy,
Marietta Wethington, OSU

REPLY

JoAnn Welch December 5, 2016 at 4:24 pm



Sr. Melannie...I am so sorry about the death of your sister...what a loss for you and your family...may you always be blessed with beautiful memories of her and your relationship. Peace.

REPLY

Sr eamon December 5, 2016 at 4:24 pm



Sr. Melanie,
Special prayers for your sister. She,your best friend is a double loss. Be sure of my prayers.
Love and prayers,
Sr. Eamon

REPLY

Patty December 5, 2016 at 6:33 pm



Dear Sister - Prayers for you, and, for your family. May these words, by, Sister Joyce Rupp, OSM, bring you comfort: "God never sends us where He is not already waiting our arrival."

REPLY

Tina December 5, 2016 at 7:05 pm



Dear Sr Melannie,
I am so sorry about the loss of your sister. I hope your many happy memories bring you comfort. You are in my prayers.
Love,
Tina

REPLY

Fran Dunedin,FL December 5, 2016 at 8:28 pm



My deepest sympathy on the loss of your sister. In your book With the Dawn Rejoicing you shared these words you found on a card and I feel they are so true. May you find comfort in warm memories of the beautiful life that has passed. May you find peace in the assurance that an even more beautiful life has begun. You are in my thoughts and prayers.

REPLY

Marsha December 6, 2016 at 1:35 am



Dear Sister Melannie,
My heart and my prayers go out to you and to your family. My best friends are my sisters.
Our family has grown even closer after the deaths of two of our brothers for our faith teaches us that we will see them again. Oh what a reunion that will be... meeting Christ face to face with all of our loved ones who have passed welcoming us home!
I find comfort in your writings. You have the gift of discovering the holy in the ordinary things in life. Thank you, Sister, and may you find peace.

REPLY

Jane December 6, 2016 at 7:02 am



Sister Melanie
I read your blog and marveled at its insight and beauty. Then I saw the very sad news. I was privileged to meet Mary Ann last summer at Chautauqua. My tears are joined with yours at this time of loss. My only sister lives in Massachusetts in the summer but I am blessed to have her live just around the corner from me the rest of the year. I truly feel your loss for your wonderful sister and your special relationship. We will be keeping you and your family in our love and thoughts and prayers. Blessings for you all at this very sad time.

REPLY

Josita December 6, 2016 at 4:19 pm



Dear Melannie, My heart reaches out to your heart. I'm sure sorrow has bent you and your family beyond words. I lost my sister suddenly last May due to a cerebral hemorrhage. We all have been devastated and take comfort only in the support of those we love. God's compassionate touch has allowed us to live in peace again. My love and prayers are with you and your family. Josita

REPLY

Mary Day December 6, 2016 at 5:00 pm



Sister Melannie,

My heart goes out to you and your family with deep consolation. Grieving is so difficult.

With faith, hope, and love,

Mary Day

REPLY

Annie December 6, 2016 at 10:47 pm



Thank you for sharing your thoughts and the song. Your words are beautiful, and so are you. You and your family are in my heartfelt prayers.

REPLY

Philomena December 7, 2016 at 8:32 pm



My prayers are with you and your family, she sounds like a great person to know. Thank you for t all your writings I find them so helpful.

REPLY

Pamela December 8, 2016 at 9:14 am



Sister Melannie-

So sorry for your loss. Thank you for your blogs...they inspire me. God Bless you

and your family.

REPLY

Kay December 8, 2016 at 9:19 am



Dear Melannie,

My prayers are with you and your sister's family. Lost my sister to cancer also.

REPLY

Elizabeth December 9, 2016 at 10:15 am



Dear Melannie, So sorry to hear of the sudden death of your sister. I always wanted a sister, but that never happened. However, God sends others who fill that void and they are welcomed as my "sister." Bless your great big heart. I wish you and your family peace. And your message, always on target. I am not bent over, but my spirit is many times. Worry is a curse, my demon. Thanks for your words of wisdom.
You are in my thought and prayers. Blessings, Elizabeth

REPLY

Mike December 9, 2016 at 9:41 am



Our thoughts and prayers are with you Sister and your family. On a less important note, I look forward and appreciate your writings each week - full of wisdom and care.

REPLY

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