

8/21/2016 NKPC

2 Corinthians 3:1-6 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? <sup>2</sup>You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. <sup>3</sup>You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. <sup>4</sup>Such confidence we have through Christ before God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. <sup>6</sup>He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Luke 13:10-17

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, <sup>11</sup> and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” <sup>13</sup> Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. <sup>14</sup> Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” <sup>15</sup> The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? <sup>16</sup> Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” <sup>17</sup> When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

At the Olympics in Rio this week, there is one story that has been headlined as capturing, "The Olympic Spirit". In the women's 5000 meter qualifier, Nikki Hamblin from New Zealand was running close in a pack when she accidentally clipped the heel of the person running in front of her. Before Nikki knew what had happened, she was on the ground, and Abby D'Agostino had run into her and fallen as well. As Nikki lay on the blue track stunned, Abby struggled to her feet and put her hand on Nikki's shoulder. "Get up.. Get up.. we have to finish this." Abby tried to help Nikki up, but her leg was not holding her up well. Eventually the two women stood and doggedly started to finish the five laps remaining in their race. Abby was limping and obviously injured and Nikki was going to stay behind to help her, but Abby waved Nikki to go ahead of her. Both women eventually finished the qualifier, with Nikki coming in 15th and Abby in 16th, over two minutes behind the victor.

While neither of the women's times were good enough to qualify for the final event on Friday, a formal protest lodged by their teams was accepted and both women were allowed to advance. However the medical report for Abby later that day was heartbreaking. The fall had torn a

ligament in her knee. Her Olympic race was over. In her own words, Abby describes the incident:

*'In a split second, there was a woman on the ground in front of me, I tripped on her, someone behind me tripped on me, and I was on the ground. Although my actions were instinctual at that moment, the only way I can and have rationalized it is that God prepared my heart to respond that way. This whole time here he's made clear to me that my experience in Rio was going to be about more than my race performance—and as soon as Nikki got up I knew that was it. '*

In our scripture today, we have Jesus also helping someone to stand up tall. For eighteen years, this woman had suffered and was crippled and bent over in pain. This is not the first time nor the last time that Jesus healed someone who had a chronic condition. But it is interesting to note when and how Jesus does it. Just imagine the scene. It is a Jewish synagogue, and Jesus is in the middle of the room, teaching and interpreting the Hebrew scriptures. Standing on the floor of the synagogue, or seated to the left and right all around him are the Jewish men. In the back of the room by the door, there is a partition and behind the partition are all of the women and the children under 12 years old. Traditionally, the women are not allowed to come and worship alongside the men. And so

the very first rule that Jesus breaks is to bring the woman forward, out of the shadows at the back right into the front and center of the assembly.

Sometimes drawing attention to something is the best way to begin to address a problem that no one is talking about. Dr Melody Gunn is the former principle of Gibson Elementary School in St. Louis. The struggling school that she was in charge of had a huge attendance problem.

Students were just not making it to school, and because they were not there, they were not learning and the scores on the standardized tests for the school showed it. While there were some special resources available to help the struggling students in the school, the kids first needed to show up in order to take advantage of them. So Dr. Gunn decided to go talk to some of the parents to find out why their kids were not in school and she found out a fact that surprised her. --With a parent juggling several part time jobs with ever shifting schedules and living in rental housing, one of the biggest struggles was finding the time and the resources to take their dirty laundry to the Laundromat. There were many weeks where the two hour block of time and car availability and the stack of quarters needed to do the laundry just did not line up. And for others, while they had a washer and dryer in their home, while their electricity was shut off, one of the things

they were making do without was clean laundry. And so the student, who already was facing the major peer pressures of school and its rigid fashion requirements would sometimes skip school if they felt they had nothing appropriate and clean to wear.

Faced with this issue, Dr. Gunn decided to call attention to this problem and she wrote a letter to the Whirlpool Corporation asking them to donate a washer and a dryer to their school. Whirlpool was intrigued by the request. They did their own research and found out that 1 in 5 students have trouble finding clean clothes to wear to school. So Whirlpool donated a washer and a dryer to Gibson Elementary School in St. Louis and another school in Fairfield California. It helped, a lot. Attendance improved, with the at risk students making it to school almost 10 more days than they had the year previously. And the participating students averaged 50 loads of laundry that they washed and dried while at school. The teachers also noticed a change in attitude in the students. Students who now had a reliable source of clean clothes were participating more in class and engaging in the learning process more. With the great success of this pilot program, Whirlpool is planning on expanding their school laundry program to 30 more school districts this coming year. They hope that it

becomes as widespread as the free or reduced lunch program. While no one is complaining that kids now have clean clothes and are in school more, there are still many who question about the logistics of who runs the machines and are asking if the kids are using class time to do laundry or if it is appropriate for a volunteer to wash a child's underwear. While the program is allowing each district to decide these details for themselves, the argument going on sounds a lot like the complaints in our scripture.

While Jesus did not get any complaints that the woman who was crippled for 18 years was now healed, there were complaints that the healing was done during the Sabbath, the day that was reserved for God. The leader of the Synagogue was the one who complained to the people. "You have six days during the week to heal people. Now is not the time for it!" But Jesus knew the spirit of the law very well and knew that the complaint by the religious leader was simply his way of using the Jewish law to push his bullying use of power and control. He pointed out that while they would think nothing of leading their animal to the water on the Sabbath, that the brief act of healing this woman was so much more important and less time consuming than watering their animals.

In our churches today, we can easily fall into this trap. Sometimes we get so enamored with our process to do things, "Decently and in order" that we are willing to sacrifice the spirit of love in order to make sure that everything is done within the proper time frame and with all the right votes and procedures. We put our love of the laws which guide us above the Spirit that gives us life.

This very thing happened to me recently. Some of you may know that I am part of a group of people who have created a new non profit organization that is designed to manage and make disciples for Jesus at Camp Greenwood. Our new organization is called *Greenwood Ministries Association*, and as of July 1st, we are incorporated as a non profit in the state of Michigan. --The Presbytery has determined that they have no interest in running Camp Greenwood the way that they have been or in investing a lot more time, money and energy into the camp. And so they have asked for proposals from interested organizations and this next week the Presbytery Leadership Team will hear proposals and make a recommendation concerning the future of the camp.

So our group of dedicated volunteers who love Camp Greenwood have been meeting since the Spring in order to create an organization that

is designed to not only run traditional church camps up at Greenwood but also one that is broadly based enough to create new opportunities for ministry. Among those is a partnership with Alma college for environmental studies and with others who are focused on land conservation and human development. Since one of the things that the Presbytery requested in their proposal was a sense of the depth of financial support the organization has, our organization sent out an email to people on the camps email list asking for pledges to this new organization. The Presbytery was very unhappy with us. We had not gotten their permission to send out a solicitation email to their Camp Greenwood email list. We had broken the letter of the law in order to follow the spirit of the request for proposals. We, much like Jesus in our scripture today, was found guilty because we dared to be led by our hearts and to simply do what we are called to do.

This coming week, I will be meeting with the Presbytery on Monday and Thursday to answer questions about this new organization, *Greenwood Ministries Association*. I ask for your prayers for the entire process and all of the people there to be led by the Holy Spirit and for the Spirit of Christ's love and not fear to prevail. I pray for the future of Camp



Greenwood and for the future of the Presbytery. May Christ be glorified in it all.

In conclusion, the rules of process and the structures in which we live and work and create church are good and necessary things. Whether you are running in an Olympic event, running a school or running a camp or a church, having systems which allow all people to be heard and to be safe and cared for is the best way to be organized and not to waste time and effort. However, when the Spirit of Love moves us to act, there is a time to simply set aside the rules and to care for people. May we all act with such love in our hearts and be willing to accept the costs of such discipleship. Amen.