October 13, 2019, Sunday

Sunday for the Mentally & Physically

Challenged and Palliative Patients

Disability: Care and Honour

OT 2 Sam.9 :1-13; Psalm 146; Epistle Acts.9: 32-35; Gospel Mark 3:1-6

O Lord our God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the great healer of every kind of illness: grant peace to those who are torn by mental conflicts and strength to the physically impaired and uphold them with the power of Your Spirit. Let the Church be a channel of Your love and care to them; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord who affirmed the dignity of the mentally and physically challenged in His earthly life, and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. **Amen**

Key Verse: The Lord said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." - Bible



Rev. Silvan Chandrakumar A. On Oct 13, 2019

India is faced with a twin burden of communicable as well as noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), setting a complex health policy challenge. The WHO defined palliative care as 'an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with a life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, impeccable assessment, and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial, and spiritual.' It is estimated that in India the total number of people who need palliative care is likely to be 5.4 million people a year. The need for care and honor is ever-increasing at a faster pace due to an increase in the aging population as well as an increase in communicable and other NCDs.

The rights (Care & Honor) of people with disabilities are well protected in existing international, regional, and national human rights instruments. The purposes of the Act are to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. They are further meant to facilitate the full participation of PWD in all sectors of society.

There are three traditional biblical and theological themes identified that have created obstacles for people with disabilities (PWD) - Namely: The first is conflating disability with sin. The second theme views disability as virtuous suffering. The third theme perceives PWD as cases of charity. However, Christ's ministry for the differently-abled is evident in the Bible. The healing narratives in the Gospels gives insight into viewing theology as liberative rather than discriminatory. Christ's mission on earth, which is spelt out clearly in Matthew 11:2-5 and Luke 4: 18-19 (also

called the Nazareth Manifesto) supports a liberative theology. When asked by John's disciples: 'Are you He who is to come or do we look for another?' Jesus responded with words recalling the prophecies of Isaiah: 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see; the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them' (Mt. 11:3-5). Although Biblical and theological views of disability have led to a discriminatory and exclusive approach to viewing PWD, it is important to point out that perspectives that take an emancipatory and inclusive approach to disability issues are also found in the Bible and Christian theology.

...And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table; he was lame in both feet. The theme of the restoration of PWD is seen in the story of Mephibosheth (2 Sam.9). Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, King David's great friend. He had become lame on both feet as a result of being dropped by a fleeing nursemaid when he was young. The world looked at Mephibosheth as a useless, good-for-nothing man; being lame, he could not go out and be a warrior. To King David, all the disadvantages of being lame appeared insignificant. King David's act is seen as a reflection of Jesus Christ's compassion and serves as an example of the complete restoration of a person with a disability to normal life.

'Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.' Immediately Aeneas got up... **Aeneas** is a PWD in the New Testament. According to Acts 9:32-33, he lived in Lydda, and had been a cripple for eight years. When **Peter** said to him, 'Jesus Christ **heals** you. Get up and roll up your mat,' he was **healed** and got up. According to David J. Williams, the text would literally be rendered as Peter telling Aeneas to 'spread for himself', which might not refer to his bedding, but something else he had been unable to do. We do not know about Aeneas' background, but the fact that he is only referred to as 'a certain man,' not 'a disciple,' seems to indicate that he was not a believer.

It is not accidental that the Aneneas story echoes Luke 5:17–20. Peter's act is seen as a reflection of Jesus Christ's mercy on PWD. Our radical lifestyle and behavior have the potential to cause people to turn to the Lord. We need to do three things to restore PWD and show the world their rightful place: The restoration of self-esteem, The restoration of their identity and The restoration to society.

'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' Christ announced his mission in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4: 18-19). Whether it was a person born blind in John 9 or the individual with the withered hand in MK 3, Jesus was moved with compassion whenever he encountered PWD.

Jesus's ministry is bound up with the fact that He sought the company of people who, for one reason or another, were forced to live on the fringe of society (cf. Mk. 7:37). He made the special object of His attention,

declaring that the last would be first and that the humble would be exalted in His Father's kingdom (cf. Mt. 20: 16, 23:12). Indeed, the four gospels show Jesus spending much time with the 'least' in society, and he displayed great compassion for PWD.



WE CARE

People who suffer from disabilities also have the right to live upfront in society. In Scriptures, Jesus primarily removes societal barriers in order to create accessible and accepting communities. He did not want the blind, deaf, dumb, leprous, and paralytic, etc to be left behind. Christ transformed marginalized and undervalued people into whole and all-round personalities. He wanted all of them honored, restored, showing his concern for them. By healing (not merely curing) PWD, Jesus brought them to the mainstream of society.

Jesus created an inclusive community where no one was excluded on the basis of ability-disability. Likewise, the mission of the church is to make sure that the existing walls of discrimination in society are removed. Impairment should not be an excuse for not integrating PWD into the church and society. **The good news of the Gospel is that it creates care and honor for PWD in communities** by challenging oppressive and dehumanizing systems and structures. Christ did not leave PWD behind as liability and neither should church.