

"Able and disabled"  
May 27, 2018

Mark 6:1-13, 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

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Hayward United Methodist Church

#### Call to Worship

Come, people of God, without pack, without purse, without pride,

**without any purpose but to worship the Creator in word, song, and silence.**

Let nothing distract you from the presence of God today.

**God has blessed us in this fellowship, and will continue to reward, renew, restore, and alarm us with new faces, new friends, and new hope.**

#### Prayer of Invocation

**Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ the Lord, Amen.**

#### The Word

2 Corinthians 12:6-10 The Message Version

If I had a mind to brag a little, I could probably do it without looking ridiculous, and I'd still be speaking plain truth all the way. But I'll spare you. I don't want anyone imagining me as anything other than the fool you'd encounter if you saw me on the street or heard me talk.

Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me, 'My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.'

Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.

#### Living the Word

Temple Grandin didn't talk until she was three and a half years old, communicating her frustration instead by screaming, peeping and humming. In 1950, she was labeled "autistic," and her parents were told she should be institutionalized.

She tells her story of "groping her way from the far side of darkness" in her book *Emergence: Labeled Autistic*, a book which stunned the world because, until its publication, most professionals and parents assumed being diagnosed "autistic" was virtually a death sentence to achievement or productivity in life.

Dr. Grandin has become a prominent author and speaker on the subject of autism because, as she says : "I have read enough to know that there are still many parents, and, yes, professionals, too, who believe that 'once autistic, always autistic.'

This cliché has meant sad and sorry lives for many children diagnosed, as I was in early life, as autistic. To these people, it is incomprehensible that the characteristics of autism can be modified and controlled. However, I feel strongly that I am living proof that they can."

Even though she was considered "weird" in her young school years, she eventually found a mentor, who recognized her interests and abilities, which she later expanded into becoming a successful livestock handling equipment designer, one of very few in the world.

Temple was and is able to understand the fears of the cows and pigs as they see the unknown before them, such as when they have to enter a chute or a gate.

Her designs include circular walkways with high walls to keep distracting sights out as they move forward into an unknown space. In this way animals can be loaded and unloaded without being poked or beaten. We had one of her designed cow shuts on our farm and it was much easier to move cattle with it.

Temple has designed the facilities in which half the cattle are handled in the United States. She presently works as an Associate Professor at Colorado State University but also speaks around the world on both autism and cattle handling.

There are people in this world who would consider Temple Grandin, Doctor Grandin, disabled. With a disability some would use the word handicapped. Not long ago her 3 year old behaviors of screaming, peeping and humming instead of speech, would have earned her labels of retarded or slow.

We have changed that today, of course and yet it was not so long ago that I gently scolded an adult for labeling someone retarded. That person returned with the comment: "I'm sorry, she's 'special.'" (Emphasis and sneer used on the word 'special'.)

I do not have a doctorate, to cover physical or social medicine. Even so, there is a justice issue that falls somewhere short of 'Loving One Another' when we see, describe and relate to people as if they were less than God intended and created them to be. So first I would begin with some definitions. You see what you think God might think about this...

Let's begin with the word 'disabled' from the word 'disable': 1. To make unable or unfit; to weaken or destroy the capability of; to cripple; to incapacitate. 2. To make legally incapable; to disqualify. Does Dr. Grandin sound disabled to you? Is this what we really mean?

Lia Lee was a Hmong child diagnosed with severe epilepsy. Her parents and her doctors both wanted what was best for Lia, but because of the culture and language misunderstandings her short life was a difficult one.

The book that tells her story is entitled "The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down" in the book of that title written by Anne Fadiman. Lia's Hmong culture described her time of severe seizures as the times when 'the spirit catches her and she falls down'.

In our culture Lia was seen as an invalid (*in-vuh-lid*) - a person who is too sick or weak to care for himself or herself. This word spelled the same way, is also pronounced invalid(*in-val-id*)- not valid; without foundation; indefensible.

Yet from the life of Lia came: An example of medical anthropology, the book has been cited by medical journals and lecturers as an argument for greater cultural competence, and often assigned to medical, pharmaceutical, and anthropological students in the US. It won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction.

While we are looking at words, one more: Handicapped – I was told once that the word referred to the people with physical deformities using their cap for begging of money, and thus was a slang word for those with a disability. But the origin was from handicapping, in sport and games.

It is the practice of assigning advantage, given to different contestants to equalize the chances of winning. The original use of the word was to enable all to equality in a game. I have been invited to no longer use this word as the slang use lingers and categorizes those with disabilities as lesser - far from giving them any equalization or advantage...

I grew into the understanding that we all should work to enable everyone. An even newer understanding for me is the knowledge that we are all 'differently abled.' Not disabled, but differently abled. I say all the time that we were each created – each one unique – why would we believe that we would all think alike? Yet it goes farther than our thinking. We are all created with different abilities, why would we think that all of us will be able to do all of the same things?

It all comes to appreciating everyone's differing abilities, not always trying to enable everyone. We will never all be the same, but we can work at helping each other have a chance at a good life. It is about understanding and appreciating who each person is without disabling them. It is about looking at how each one of us can help each other obtain an 'abled' life, within their differing abilities.

We all have to work to help each other live within the realm of our abilities, without 'put-downs' and demeaning, unhelpful society labels.' Often negativity comes from fear of the unknown. When my sister Cindy began teaching children in special need classes, I was very uneducated about all of this.

Inside, I was proud of her, but that was 'her thing.' Over the years as a pastor, I have come into contact with a number of children and youth who have challenged my ignorance to the differing abilities around me.

I walked through the diagnosis and initial understanding and frustrations of a preteen and her family as they recognized and accepted Asperger's Syndrome as a part of their lives. As soon as they knew for sure, I read books and searched websites for more understanding to be a help to them as they moved forward to enable their family within this new reality.

In second Corinthians, Paul speaks of the 'gift he has been given – a 'handicap' to keep in constant touch with his limitations. He goes on to say that at first he didn't see it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Don't we all want to pray away the challenges of our lives?

Yet God told Paul "My grace is enough; it is all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness." Paul realized, as we can, that we have no need of Christ death for us, no need of faith in God, if we could do it all for and by ourselves.

When Paul realized this, he said he was 'glad to let it happen.' He quit focusing on what he was unable to do and began to appreciate what he could do because of his inability. He said: "It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness..."

Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become."

Paul was enabled to reach a 'higher level of humanness, by surrendering his weakness to God's strength. Christ calls us to be enabled through him and through the Christ we see in the people who help us become all we can be through our abilities instead of just disabled people of God.

Did you know that 'disabilities' was the name given for the legal restrictions and limitations placed on Jews in the Middle Ages. They included provisions requiring Jews to wear specific and identifying clothing such as the Jewish hat and the yellow badge, restricting Jews to certain towns or in certain parts of towns (ghettos), and forbidding Jews to enter certain trades.

Disabilities also included special taxes levied on Jews, exclusion from public life, and restraints on the performance of religious ceremonies. Some countries went even further and completely expelled Jews. This has happened a number of times in history, since the time of Jesus, who was a Jew.

Aren't you glad that we have progressed so far today? Ahh! but we are still learning. Even yesterday, I found myself being waited on by someone with what I thought was an obvious lack of abilities to do her job.

I am ashamed to say, my first thoughts were not what I wish they would be. Even after wrestling with these scriptures this week and rolling a sermon around over and over, God was ready to teach me another lesson.

I confess I initially felt some pity and justification for this person's placement in that particular job. Then they proceeded to miraculously and efficiently show me how wrong I had judged them. I was cared for and moved along possibly the very best I could have been. I had disabled them and they had enabled me.

Disability is defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities." An individual may also qualify as disabled if he/she is seen as disabled based on a personal or group standard or norm. Such impairments may include physical, sensory, and cognitive or intellectual impairments...(Repeat)

. " An individual may also qualify as disabled if he/she is seen as disabled based on a personal or group standard or norm.' How many times – unintentionally have we singled others out as disabled? Don't we all have things that we are unable to be or do? So we are all disabled in some way...How many disabilities are unseen and we assume that all is up to the standard or norm?

Jesus went to his hometown and there he gave a lecture. The people who had watched him grow up said: *"How did he get so wise all of a sudden, get such ability?" "He's just a carpenter—Mary's boy. We've known him since he was a kid. We know his brothers, James, Justus, Jude, and Simon, and his sisters. Who does he think he is?"*

*They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling. And they never got any further.*

*Jesus wasn't able to do much of anything there—he laid hands on a few sick people and healed them, that's all. He couldn't get over their stubbornness. Jesus, the perfected one, was disabled by the people around him, by their attitudes, their words, their ignorance and their fear. What did Jesus do about it? In the next verses it says this:*

*Jesus called the Twelve to him, and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority and power. He sent them off with these instructions: "Don't think you need a lot of extra equipment for this. You are the equipment. No special appeals for funds. Keep it simple.*

*"If you're not welcomed, not listened to, quietly withdraw. Don't make a scene. Shrug your shoulders and be on your way." Then they were on the road. They preached with joyful urgency that life can be radically different; right and left they sent the demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies, healing their spirits.*

Jesus enabled them. Jesus looked beyond their inabilities and said "Go and help others." And they went with joyful urgency! You and I have some inabilities. We all do! But we can also be enabled through Christ... Be like Paul and try to look beyond your inabilities. If fact, ask God to help you see them as gifts, so you can be enabled and enable others.