

# Disability Advocacy Sunday

# Invisible Disability:

Illuminating the Potential of Invisible Communities

27th November 2022

## Liturgical Elements

‘LIT’

**L**earn about invisible disabilities to identify

**I**nitiate appropriate help to reach their full potential

**T**erminate shaming - first get to know their disability



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## Disability Advocacy Sunday Liturgical Elements

### Reading portions

Job 17:1-16

Luke 8:43-48

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Psalms 139:7-15

### Collect

God who loves us with all our disabilities and makes us perfect in our own ways, thank you for trusting us as stewards of your accessible garden. We confess ruining your marvellous garden by constructing inaccessible buildings, technologies, inventions and discoveries. We have ignored the purpose of your creation with our able-normative mindset. We get carried by the miraculous signs and so called 'perfections' than the broken wounds of resurrected Christ. Help us to deconstruct our mindset to re-vision and illuminate the invisible disability in all your creation.

## **Intercessory Prayer**

Compassionate God and Parent of all,

On this Disability Advocacy Sunday, we remember all who live with disabilities, especially those that are hidden from plain sight. We acknowledge and thank you for each member of our community, unique in special ways.

**God of Grace, hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray that you help us sense the needs and disabilities of people- visible and invisible. Help us walk alongside people of abilities in the bond of friendship.

**God of Grace, hear our prayer.**

We pray for people among us who live with mental health challenges like ADHD, depression, anxiety, PTSD, schizophrenia, phobia, etc. Lord, strengthen them in their times of weakness, and give them confidence in your loving care. Help us all to be more understanding.

**God of Grace, hear our prayer.**

We pray for people who undergo chronic pain from conditions like Fibromyalgia, Arthritis, bone disease,

physical injuries, etc. Lord, ease the pain and anxiety and may your all-sufficient grace overshadow them.

**God of Grace, hear our prayer.**

We pray for persons with learning challenges like Dyslexia who look at the world and understand it differently. Help us to celebrate their unique talents and to encourage them.

**God of Grace, hear our prayer.**

We pray for people who have autoimmune conditions like Crohn's disease, Lyme disease, Lupus, multiple sclerosis, etc. Dispel all fear, hopelessness and anxiety and let your love comfort and strengthen their body and spirit.

**God of Grace, hear our prayer.**

We pray for people living with health conditions like Diabetes, Heart problems, kidney diseases, high blood pressure, age-related weaknesses, etc. Help each to cope with their limitations with dignity.

**God of Grace, hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Parent, we confess we have often overlook and consistently fail to pray for persons with invisible disabilities. We pray you will enable us to recognize and

provide appropriate assistance. Give us the right attitude, will and resolve to remove the barriers that impede human dignity and your Glory.

**God of Grace, hear our prayer.**

Lord, we thank you for the diversity of the community and the uniqueness of each person. We believe we have been chosen by your divine will. Help us to honour each other and grow together as one church, the body of Christ.

We pray in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

## **Benediction**

May God Mighty, the Invisible made Visible in the Incarnation bless us

May Love abundant made manifest in the Vulnerability of the Son keep us

May the Ever present Light shining in the Accompanying of the Spirit preserve us, Amen.

## Reflection

### *Invisible Disability: Illuminating the Potential of Invisible Community*

*(This sermon is prepared by Rev Baila Channakeshavalu who is an Ordained member of CSI Karnataka Southern Diocese also the Assistant professor in Religion Department also the practical work Dean at The Karnataka Theological College, Mangalore. He is also serving as the editor of Subodhavani (exegetical notes) a Kannada quarterly)*

Disability has been understood in negative terms in our society and communities. We cannot deny the contributions of Theological and cultural phenomena in the development of such attitudes. Our understanding about God also contributes toward our understanding about disability. Our perception about God as Perfect, Almighty and without any disabilities is one other reason to develop a negative attitude towards disability. We think there is no potential in disability and always try to find potential in perfectionism. Interpretations of the scriptures as find it convenient also play a major role in this kind of attitude. Today as we meditate upon the scripture portions we need to do so with a prayer to change our mindset and allowing ourselves to learn about invisible disabilities and to identify them. Many kinds of disabilities are there in our communities. Today

we will focus on invisible disability as per the theme given to us. As we are reflecting upon the theme we need to learn illuminating the potential of Invisible community among our community or society. Three dimensions which are suggested under the theme will help us in our reflection.

## 1. Learn (Job 17:1-16)

In the Old Testament Passage we can see the situation of Job. He was an upright person in the sight of God. God himself was giving testimony about Job to the oppressor (Satan) concerning Job's uprightness. Job had to go through the sufferings which came upon him. In Job's case God allowed sufferings to come upon him. Job was already in a bad situation. In his bad condition, he was expecting encouragement and support from his friends. But instead of consolation he was condemned by his friends. His friends did not offer him consolation. His friends made his situation worse by their furious words. Even though Job was a good person they branded him as a cursed person by God. Job's Lamentations about his condition are eye openers to us. Job is going through an invisible disability here. Instead of learning about his situation Job's friends mocked at him. How do we see the persons who are in sufferings? Do we try to

understand them or do we try to put them down by means of mocking at them and saying that they are punished by God? What is our attitude towards our own brothers and sisters who are suffering with invisible disability?

*(Exegesis: In OT Text 'Job seems to envisage his vindication taking place in heaven rather than on earth, where his situation is hopeless. He is resigned to dying but not to being estranged from God.' V. 3. In as much as the friends will not witness for him, Job begs God himself to find a guarantor who will go "bail for" Job in his presence. V. 5. This obscure verse may be understood as a proverb applicable to the friends "A man invites his neighbours to share (food) while the eyes of his children are failing from hunger. i.e., the friends are consoling the prosperous, while leaving Job in his misery. Friends failed to understand Job. They failed to learn his situation. 13-16 the speech ends with an ironic and decisive rejection of the prospects of happiness they had earlier held out to him, as part of their "consolation" Job does not believe in them, nor does he particularly desire them; he merely wants to know his standing with God. Meanwhile he would rather face the grim truth, which he describes with unflinching vividness.)*

Learning about the situations or disabilities of our friends and our fellow beings is very important here.



Jobs friends did not try to learn or understand the situation of Job. Without having the knowledge of the situation they spoke rudely to Job. This passage calls us to look into the situations of our friends who are in invisible disability and to have empathy with them. Speaking without understanding the people who are in invisible disability, we will become the reason for their misery as Job's friends did. But Job knew that God was with him and he would deliver him or he would help to cope up with his situation. If we are not able to activate empathetic action towards who are in invisible disability, at least we should not become the reason of their misery. But thank God, he will be always with us.

## **2. Initiate (Luke 8:43-48)**

The Gospel text narrates the story of a woman who was in invisible disability. Here we can see that how Jesus Initiated appropriate help to reach the full potential of the woman who came to him in faith. Her disability has been terrible in nature. If she would have communicated her disability, it could have been kept her away from the society. If she would not communicate that she has to live in depression and pain due to her disability. She was in such a helpless situation. But we should appreciate her move. She decided to come to the

presence of Jesus. She might have heard about Jesus and his teaching. Jesus was the teacher who empowered the people who came to him.

In vv. 44-46 we can learn that Jesus was touched by a so called unclean person by the then society. Sometimes we cannot understand the judgement criteria of our society. Instead of initiating appropriate help, society tries to turn aside from the responsibilities. But in Jesus God has sent all of us a saviour who embraces us all without any discrimination. We as the body of Christ we must learn not to judge any one on the basis of their disabilities.

We must learn to comprehend that God has created us with all the disabilities and made us perfect in our own ways, we need to thank God for crafting us as stewards in his church. We should discontinue our attitude of looking for perfection in everything. We all know that none of us are perfect in the sight of God. We need to look at our disabilities in the light of vulnerability and remember wounds of Resurrected Christ which gives us new insights to embrace our brothers and sisters who are in invisible disability. We must confess our hypocrisy in accepting realities of life. Unless, we deconstruct our mindset about disability we cannot have re-vision and illumination towards invisible

disability which is prevailing in creation through all of the creation.

V. 47. Gives us the picture of the woman who has moved from fear to a confession of grateful faith in the presence of the people. The initiation of Jesus helped her in this move. The woman who has been considered as vulnerable and imperfect by the society now has been empowered by Lord Jesus. In verse 48, Jesus appreciates the woman by saying 'your faith' has healed you. She had faith in God's power in Jesus to restore her back to health. She no longer remained imperfect and vulnerable or disabled. The social stigma which had separated her from life and cult in the name of uncleanness has changed. Jesus changed her status in the society and restored her to health. Jesus changed the mindset of people around him and her. He taught them how to perceive the things of God in one's life. What is perfect in our sight may be imperfect in Gods sight. What is imperfect in our perception may be perfect in God's creation. Therefore as the people of God we should stop suppressing Gods creation in the name of disabilities. We must stretch our hands towards the invisible disability and facilitate them to live dignified

lives. Jesus restored the woman as a daughter who belongs to reconstituted Israel.

We need to reconstitute and reconstruct our thinking which will accept each and everybody as special creation of God with having special and extra ordinary skills in dealing with God given life.

### **3. Terminate (2 Corinthians 12:1-10)**

We need to terminate the attitude of shaming the helpless on the basis of their disability. Life may give disability to anybody at anytime which no one can predict. We should not behave like the friends of Job who mocked at him in his disable condition. But God was with him and he changed his situation. We should not be like the society which suppressed the women for years. If somebody trying to suppress us we need to be like the woman who dared to touch the garment of Jesus through which she got restoration. The help of God is always available to us. God is looking for helpers in us. Let us learn to help like Jesus. He is our model in initiating help towards those who are in need.

Leaving everything to God is best example found in the epistle text. Apostle Paul speaks about his weakness here. We cannot specify what kind of weaknesses he

had in his life. Paul's life and missionary journey was not so easy. He had to go through many difficulties in his ministry. His own community was against him and was trying to offend him wherever he went. II Corinthians 11th chapter briefly explains about Paul's sufferings. He might have had some kind of disability which had disturbed him. Paul prayed for the relief but God's answer "My Grace is sufficient for you". Paul might have learnt to rely upon God in his worst situations. God is there with us to help us in our conditions. He will give us strength to move forward when we allow him to deal with our situations. Our friends may turn into foes in our disabled conditions but God is ever present help to us. His grace is the enabling power which helps us to terminate or get rid of the things which we should not bother about. If we have negative attitude towards invisible disability we need to terminate it and cultivate positive attitude. We who have invisible disability need to terminate the inferiority which is inside of us and should move forward by trusting our God. Our God is a vulnerable God who is co sufferer with us in our sufferings. Our Lord Jesus himself has gone through the experience of invisible disability and he will be with us always. May God bless all of us. Amen.

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