

I Want More

Delivered 08/20-21/2022 (Proper 16 / Pentecost + 11) at Grace Episcopal Church, Traverse City

I want more. I want more from St. Luke; I want more from this Gospel reading; I want more from Jesus. I want more from this World. I want the name of the woman in today's story to be recorded because her identity is not the shape of her body. I want her words of consent recorded before Jesus lays His hands on her. I want a World where I don't need a Black Lives Matter sign in my office window because all lives really do matter in this World. I want a World where I don't need Pride flags on my desk because everyone can live without fear of being who God has made them to be. I want a World that, by default, plans for differently abled, and differently shaped, bodies.

And yet, I'm a realist. I have long-since accepted that this is not the World we live in and that it was not the World of the woman in today's Gospel account. There are things that, when pressed, I feel compelled to say that I hope for; but, honestly, I know that I've resigned myself to accepting some things as "just the way that it is" because I no longer have any expectation that they will be addressed in my lifetime. There are things that I used to pray for, in hope that they'd change, that I now pray only for the strength to make it through the days while the unfair, unholy, and unmerciful systems, that we have made, that we perpetuate, and that we choose to allow, remain in place.

I wonder when, in her eighteen years of being bent over, the woman in today's Gospel stopped praying for a cure? I wonder when she stopped praying for the day when shelves wouldn't be made so high, when stairs wouldn't be so prevalent, or when ramps would stop being nonexistent. I wonder when she started to pray for strength to make it through each day in a World that repeatedly communicated the lie that it was not made for her, too. I wonder when she resigned herself to stop looking up at the stars and dreaming of a better World? I wonder when she decided to just keep her head down and survive as best she could.

You see, I wonder these questions because I don't think that the miracle was that Jesus made her spine straight again; I think the miracle is that He restored her hope in a better World. The miracle is that He lifted her up so that she could look up again. He saw her; He called her. He showed her that healing and wholeness were possible in the here and now and not just in some later life after death; but again, that healing wasn't about her spine – it was about the World being a better place than it was, a better place than it is. And she knew it – her first words after standing up again were praise to God. Praise to God for re-enlivening her faith; praise to God for this Rabbi who was bringing about a new, hope-filled, World. Praise to God that when the systems we have created for the World left so much out of reach for her that God intervened and changed the World because of her all-but-abandoned prayer of many years ago. And so I have to hope that she did give her consent to be a part of this new, better World; even if it was without words, the echo of a prayer long-ago prayed resonated with Jesus and caused the two of them to connect on a level beyond words. And, I have to believe that she looked at Him and communicated her readiness for a new way of being just by the look in her eyes.

And so, our challenge this week is to reach back and to remember what we used to hope for that we now just pray for the strength to endure. Remember a time in your life when you were a naive, wide-eyed, idealist who really thought we would change the World, make a difference, be better. To once again pray for hopes and dreams that we thought could never happen in our lifetime is an act of faith, it is the Good News, it is preaching life where there once was only death. To once more believe that homelessness could be ended in our lifetime rather than be a fact of life. To once more believe that sexism could be eradicated in our lifetime, that racism could become a relic of history in our lifetime, to truly believe that all lives could actually matter in our society in our lifetime. These are the kinds of dreams that Jesus came to restore. These are the kinds of dreams that God hopes we will co-create with God and with each other. If this Gospel story is of any value to us today, it is because the restoration of hope comes to us just as it did to those in this story from two millennia ago. It is our call to pray for this better World and know that Jesus sees us, calls us, restores us, and reveals this better World.

So, let us pray anew. Let words of praise to God be our constant reply. Let us dream anew. Let us cry out to God for a better World. Let us look up and wonder what we are being called to accomplish in transforming this World. And, in honor of this unnamed woman, from this unnamed town, let us go, at the appointed time, a people forgiven, healed, renewed, and bring forth the reign of God!

~The Rev. Dr. Derek J. Quinn, Deacon