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**Saint Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

### **No More Waiting: a Sermon for Love Boldly Sunday**

#### **Matthew 8:14-22**

When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were possessed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."

Now when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. A scribe then approached and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

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My seminary education was partially funded by wages earned waiting tables for a national gourmet burger chain. It wasn't glamorous. My most vivid memory is probably a head over heels pratfall where two corndogs and their accompanying fries ended up all over the restaurant. The table I was serving half-rose from their booth, mouths gaping open. "I'm fine." I croaked, before sprinting to the kitchen to hide my shame, and ask for more corndogs—on the fly.

Waiting tables is pretty much humiliating. You have to be friendly and open, but not obtrusive. You have to put up with bad—and even offensive—jokes. With being unheard, un-cared about. And sometimes, being outright belittled or abused. And, worst of all, every single shift you put up with people taking your labor for granted (and too often proving it by leaving no tip). Of course, landing flat on your back surrounded by corndogs and french fries is a particular brand of humility.

I was so glad for that job—flexible hours, a decent boss and coworkers, and, really, a good night of tips paid me pretty well. But I also worked with a lot of people who were supporting families on those same tips. This was their second job. Or they were in the kitchen, the only kind of work that didn't really check their paperwork too closely, where they'd work long hours and go home to a crowded apartment and a bed they shared with a stranger who worked the opposite shift. Every one of them waiting for a day when they didn't need this job. When they could do something meaningful, something they'd trained to do. Or when they could go home and live in safety. Or when they could just be seen and appreciated for who they are, and not for remembering the extra napkins.

So many folks are waiting. Waiting for justice. Waiting for equality. Waiting for a chance to do something meaningful. And Scripture tells us again and again that these are the folks God calls and heals and makes witnesses to the new thing God is doing among us.

This story from Matthew's gospel is one of my least favorites. The two-verse story of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law could easily be headlined: Jesus heals a woman so she could make him dinner. Ugh. Many English translations use the word "wait:" she began to wait on him. Like a waitress. Can I take your order, Son of Man?

Waiting is a theme for the marginalized. On the one hand, society compels marginalized folks—women, people of color, immigrants, queer folk, the formerly incarcerated, non-neurotypical folks, people who are disabled... they are compelled into lives of service: labor that we want done out of sight worked by people we want out of sight.

On the other hand, "just wait" is society's regular response to the marginalized's call for justice. I am ashamed to admit that I have uttered these words, dismissively asking the Beloved of Christ to accept incremental change rather than the complete overhaul that is necessary to set them free. We ask folks to wait until the time is right, and that just never seems to happen. We ask people to trust a process, but the process always serves the status quo and never the hopeful, just future so longed for.

I'll never forget when the Rev. Angela Kahbeeb, who is a phenomenal preacher and pastor, told me that the problem from Black women pastors like her isn't getting a first call to a congregation, it is getting a second call. And that remains true for queer pastors, too. I'll also never forget a beloved member of the congregation that raised me telling me that they'd never call a woman again, because there had been conflict in the congregation during the tenure of the woman who served the congregations in the 90s. The first pastor I remember.

Just wait. That's what the Church says. Just wait. That's what our country says. Just wait for it to work through the courts, through the legislature, meanwhile, service is denied because of who you love. Just wait while a person who looks just like you is detained, or beaten, or killed. Just wait while you're passed over for a promotion or tenure. Just wait while your benefits are taken away.

I have a hard time with the story about Peter's mother-in-law because it feels like more of the same. The same wait for justice, the same relegation to the shadows. Like a teenager in a snack commercial, Jesus and his rag-tag bunch of rowdy disciples show up at supper time, starving, and Peter's mother-in-law is in no shape to serve them.

But here's what I notice. First, there is no request, no expectation that she serve them, but, having been wondering around the Galilean countryside healing other folks, as soon as Jesus learns of her fever, he heals her. Second, she doesn't jump up to be their waitress, she rises to minister to him—*diakonia* in the Greek. Like a diaconal minister. Just a few short chapters ago, Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights and then, at his hungriest and lowest, he was tempted by Satan three times. When he denied the Adversary a third and final time, Satan left and angels ministered to Jesus. *Diakonia*.

Jesus doesn't raise her so she can get him a snack. Jesus raises her into her calling. Her vocation. Throughout the gospel, Jesus is ministered to—served by, waited on, diaknoia-ed—by scores of women, most of them as nameless as Peter's mother-in-law. In Matthew 27, when Jesus died, they were there—it says, "Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had diaknoia-ed for him." Turn the page, the next chapter, and there they are. The first witnesses of the resurrection. Those told to wait are the first witnesses of God's dawning day of justice. They are the first to know of God's right-side-upping of the world.

And, Beloved in Christ, so, too, in this day. Those told to wait will be the first to witness God's new thing. One of the things I believe we're trying to do here at St. Thomas is to be the place where people who were once told to wait can, instead, live fully enough into their vocations that they, too, can witness the resurrection and tell the rest of us about it. That queer folk and immigrants, and people of color, and folks of varying abilities and non-neurotypical folk—that in this place their witness is greeted with a new song and with shouts of joy. That anyone told to wait will hear stories of Scripture that include people who are just like them, people not granted space in the hall of power, but still heard; people waiting, and still granted justice; people not powerful, and still beloved. That people once pushed to the side or asked to change and told to wait can instead live fully into who they are in Christ, can be completely who they have been called to be through their baptisms, people who have a unique vantage point on the dawning new day of God and, thanks be to God, can proclaim it from the midst of us.

Amen.