

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

From time to time, I get emails promoting a publication with sermon ideas in them. These emails are simply electronic promotional flyers that we call junk mail when it shows up in our mailbox but its called spam when it shows up on our computer. So I scrolled down through this particular email because I saw something about Frank Llyod Wright and I have always admired architects. So this email begins with this story about Frank Lloyd Wright...I never found out what that sermon was about because I didn't read past the bit about Frank Lloyd Wright.

Wright, it said, was fond of an incident that may have seemed insignificant at the time, but had a profound influence on the rest of his life. The winter he was 9, he went walking across a snow-covered field with his reserved, no-nonsense uncle. As the two of them reached the far end of the field, his uncle stopped him. He pointed out his own tracks in the snow, straight and true as an arrow's flight, and then young Frank's tracks meandering all over the field. "Notice how your tracks wander aimlessly from the fence to the cattle to the woods and back again," his uncle said. "And see how my tracks aim directly *to my goal*. There is an important lesson in that." Years later the world-famous architect liked to tell how the experience had contributed to his philosophy in life. "I determined right then," he'd say, "not to miss the things in life, that my uncle had missed."¹

I mention this because like the great artists of our time, be they architects, engineers, painters, sculptors, even scientist, doctors, writers, teachers, and theologians their thoughts, their ideas, and their visions are not restricted or confined to cultural norms or generational rules and regulations...they are not restricted by a straight and direct line, they wonder, they observe, and they dream beyond what is expected. But more than that, when I think about how we read, ingest, and distill Holy Scripture or other devotions at times, we seem to aim them directly *to our own goals*, to an outcome set within our goals centered in ourselves. Do scripture passages change our directions, our perspectives, or even us...or do *we* aim them directly to "my" goal or our goal, rather, do we aim them and direct them to our ideals, our likes and dislikes, or our understanding?

Our Gospel lesson today calls us to wonder away from the confines of our politically correct straight restrictive notions within our culture and away from ourselves. In other words, our culture will have something to say about this passage and what is occurring here in this place with Jesus, his four called disciples, and Simon's mother-in-law, but are we confined to what the culture feels or do we drift away from that and wonder about what Jesus is teaching us in this Gospel lesson?

Today, we consider ourselves to be modern, sophisticatedly high tech, scientifically grounded, and thoughtful advanced people. We have moved beyond this time and culture within our Gospel lesson. We believe that since we are enlightened, sophisticated, and culturally advanced we have become the architects of our own reality. We make our opportunities and we make our own luck. In our confidence and sophistication, we have gained the capacity to comprehend, explain, and master the world we exist in through our theoretical and applied forms of science,

¹ <http://www.sermons.com>

technology, and even theology. And because of this, we hold fast to the straight and true ways and norms that guide us and direct us to the very goals we center in ourselves.

In turn, we believe it is up to us to do something in the world, or nothing will be done...that is until WHAT needs to be done is beneath us or beyond our job description. After all, we are modern, sophisticated, scientific, and thoughtful people...that menial stuff is up to “them.” And we all know who “they” are...so there is no way that a modern woman of our time would get up from her sick bed and begin serving Jesus and these four disciples...this is degrading to her as a woman.

We may say its belittling, its degrading, or its just plain down rude for her to do this. In our very frank, honest, straight assessment of this quaint story in our Gospel lesson today we see just how far we have moved beyond the patriarchal society of old. This may have been the norm of that culture, but it is certainly no longer the norm of our culture today. We are much better than this. But let’s wonder away from that notion for a moment.

Is this Gospel lesson simply holding a mirror up for us to see our progress, as we like to see it, or is there something more, something off the direct path for us to see. Luther might suggest that perhaps another point of view may be helpful...he writes this:

Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, (our choice), being so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them, ...(our nature)... even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.”²

In the mindset of our culture today we may be insulted by this woman getting up from her sick bed to serve these men...and in our insulted sensitivities we might find ourselves assuming that God would never allow this or even expect this of this woman. But in our assumption, are we missing the essence of this story? Have we directed God to our own will through our sensitivities? Sadly if we walk straight and true into the scorn of insult of this situation with this woman, we just despise this situation and it will never teach us anything.

I am reminded of Bonhoeffer’s remarks in regard to this,

“We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.”³

Simon’s mother-in-law is healed and we hear that she began to serve the five men in the house at that time. For some, our sensitivities would find this insulting or offensive in our modern frame of mind, but let me ask you to wonder away from the straight and true line that leads us to insult and offense and look around at the bigger picture...look beyond the woman serving, and look beyond our own sensitivities and listen or think about what this scene in this private home is revealing to us today within the community of this worship gathering.

² Johnston, Mark. *Saving God, Religion After Idolatry*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press: 2009. Chapter 6 entitled “Why God?” under the heading, “The Fall” page 88

³ Bonhoeffer Dietrich, *Letters and Papers from Prison*. From the opening section entitled, “After Ten Years. A Reckoning made at New Year 1943” under the heading, *Contempt for Humanity?* Pages 9-10.

One of the most impactful theologians in my understanding of my faith, the church, and my understanding of the Holy Trinity was most certainly Dietrich Bonhoeffer. As Bonhoeffer watched the homeland he so loved being torn asunder by the Nazis, his view of the church, which emerged for him during this time, was that of a "community of responsibility"...a community that like Christ was willing to serve others and even suffer on behalf of Christ. Bonhoeffer's view of the church he calls the "community of responsibility" is also challenged to be more open and inclusive...and willing to struggle and uphold those human values which over centuries had formed the basis of Western civilization.⁴

Simon's mother-in-law is NOT degrading herself she is following her call to serve after being raised up by Jesus. When you look at the Greek text you see that this woman's service to these five men is the same service the angels provide for Jesus in the wilderness...it is the same service Jesus speaks of later in this Gospel, when he says:

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

God's Son came to serve, not to be served...he came to suffer and die and NOT to win the adulation of the crowds. Just as Jesus serves us today...Simon's mother-in-law serves...when we are healed of the fever of sin and death will it be beneath us to serve? The healing of Simon's mother-in-law is her call to service to others. Likewise, the fever of our very own sin and death has been soothed and healed by Jesus Christ, and in this we too are called to serve, to be the grace of the Kingdom of God in this world, to proclaim the Good News in the grace and mercy we ourselves share or serve to others. This is also reflected today within Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel. ¹⁹ For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them.
(1 Cor 9:16-19)

Simon's mother-in-law is raised up, she is freed of her illness and in that freedom, she serves others...and yes, as Paul says, she is slave to all...NOT in an antebellum way, rather she is bound to the service of others by the very Gospel that raised her from her fever.

There is within our Gospel lesson today a very tender moment that I just love. Listen again:

³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Today, here in this place, in this Holy Meal, once again, Jesus takes our hand and raises us from the fever of our sin and death through Word, bread, and wine. Isaiah asks today, have you not heard? Have you not seen the significance of this message...the significance is NOT INSULT, it is simply a call to service, it is

⁴ <https://www.scielo.org>. Bonhoeffer's thoughts on a credible church for today

a call to speak in truth and action. Have you not heard? Have you not known that, as often as we eat of this bread and drink of this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (*1 Corinthians 11:26*) Have you not heard? Have you not known that:

...we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"-- we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.
(2 Corinthians 4:13-15)

In the Words of Holy Scripture presented to us this day, we hear once again the promise God makes to us in Jesus Christ...that we too are raised up, raised up from sin and death. May our service to others and the message we share...of grace and salvation move from this synagogue and beyond our homes and extend to more and more people to increase the thanksgiving to the glory of God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.