

August 9, 2020

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Reading: Matthew 9.18-26, Matthew 15.21-28

The Message: You too Can Evolve!

[Video](#)

A few weeks ago I spoke about learning from the pandemic to love the stranger - get over differences and realise that people who are not out to hurt us are not to be feared.

We have learned through our Isolation that we can't survive without

the people who look different from us who deliver our food,
the people who think differently than we do who clean the surfaces we touch,
The people who sound different who diagnose and treat our illnesses,
and the people who act differently who fix the wifi that has been out for a week even if he did come to my house an hour and a half early while I was working at the church.

Another thing the pandemic has taught me is the essential need for individual and mass adaptability.

I remember two parishioners who had knee surgery on the same day. Dave arrived at church for the first time after 8 weeks. He was full of complaints. The pain, lousy hospital food, the terrible staff, the difficulty getting around, the physio, the pain. Even his digestion was brought up, and the stairs from the lobby to the sanctuary got an earful.

Then Virginia arrived and I introduced them saying they had shared a knee surgery date. He elicited her complaints. She couldn't have been happier. The medical staff were wonderful. The operation was a miracle, the physio helped her improve so quickly. She practically floated up the stairs.

I learned a lot about adapting from Virginia that day. And adapting is as essential to being a Christian as is patience, love and compassion.

Jesus was having a conversation with some followers of John the Baptist about fasting -- he's against it. As long as he is with his followers they should be celebrating. And then there are metaphors about sewing and winemaking. In this moment at least from Matthew's perspective, Jesus sees his mission as training his followers to be disciples in mission.

In the midst of his teaching, suddenly a leader of the synagogue -- elsewhere called Jairus -- rushes in and begs Jesus to lay his hand on his daughter to bring her back to life.

Seeing himself as a teacher -- a rabbi -- he is about his important work. Jesus stops what he is doing and follows this distraught father. A grieving father causes him to change direction.

So Jesus is on his way to raise a young girl -- already an interruption -- But as if that isn't enough, a woman bleeding for 12 years touches his robe.

Jesus turns to her and encourages her saying, 'your faith has made you well.' And then he goes on to raise the young girl.

a father interrupts Jesus and yet he responds

a woman touches his robe -- by the norms of his society, he would not be speaking to a woman outside of his family in public, let alone come into physical contact - yet he responds by all the norms of his society he has been touched by a woman who has been unclean for twelve years! And yet he responds.

Then he goes on to raise the child.

Later in Matthew's gospel, again Jesus is teaching, this time about what behaviour degrades a person. He leaves and goes into foreign territory, the district of Tyre and Sidon, where a foreign woman accosts him, shouting out in pain that her daughter is being tormented by a demon.

He tried not answering, but the disciples told him to send her away because she continued to shout at them.

He tried answering with his mission statement:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

That didn't work: she knelt before him and begged him for help.

Still he tried to persist in his own way.

"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

And still she persisted. Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table.

"Woman, great is your faith!" And her daughter was healed instantly.

These are stories of faith persisting even in the most hopeless of situations.

But they are also stories of a teacher who is called out of himself to become a healer, and along the way he is changed, his mission is changed, his relationship with women is changed.

By the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus focus has changed:

Instead of training his followers how to BE disciples,
Jesus is teaching them how to MAKE disciples.

I can't help thinking that the interruptions on his journey have contributed to the changes that have happened in Jesus. That adapting to the strangeness of others, the interruptions of others, the ways that his society's norms have been challenged, that the faith of these women, these foreign unclean women has honed Jesus' vision, has widened the reach of his love and powerfully transformed how we are invited in to his ministry and to his salvation. We are able to be inheritors of God's promise because of these women.

I can't help thinking that the interruptions on our journeys, our encounters with the strangeness of others, the interruptions of others into our lives, the ways that our norms are challenged, and the faith of those who seem most different to us -- all these have the same power to transform us, to widen the circle of our love, and prepare us to receive God's promises.

We have been without wifi for chunks of our summer both at our farm and recently at home. We have watched dvds and even vhf tapes on ancient machines that are often temperamental. We have had to learn to pause before we eject, to wait to see if things will run smoothly.

For the sake of your soul, pause before you eject people from your life, people who might look or behave or be different from your understanding of the norm. Those are the very people who might be God's agents of transformation, evolution in your spiritual journey. They just might be agents of Christ in your salvation.