

“Different Pictures: Intellectual Health”

Matthew 9: 18-26

As he finished saying this, a local official appeared, bowed politely, and said, “My daughter has just now died. If you come and touch her, she will live.” Jesus got up and went with him, his disciples following along.

20-22 Just then a woman who had hemorrhaged for twelve years slipped in from behind and lightly touched his robe. She was thinking to herself, “If I can just put a finger on his robe, I’ll get well.” Jesus turned—caught her at it. Then he reassured her: “Courage, daughter. You took a risk of faith, and now you’re well.” The woman was well from then on.

23-26 By now they had arrived at the house of the town official, and pushed their way through the gossips looking for a story and the neighbors bringing in casseroles. Jesus was abrupt: “Clear out! This girl isn’t dead. She’s sleeping.” They told him he didn’t know what he was talking about. But when Jesus had gotten rid of the crowd, he went in, took the girl’s hand, and pulled her to her feet—alive. The news was soon out, and traveled throughout the region.

The Word of God for the People of God. Thanks be to God.

“This is not how I pictured my life”. We often tell ourselves this when the image of what we assumed our life would be like and what reality actually holds for us stands in stark contrast with each other. Growing up, at one point or another, we all have this image of what our life will be like when we finally “make it” as adults. Except for many of us, our lives took and continue to take unexpected turns. Jobs were lost. Moves were made across the country. New interests emerged. Relationships changed. Loss and pain happened maybe years ago but they have us reeling from their effects still today.

Any of these things, all these things can change and do change the picture of what we assumed our life would be, what we expected our life to be when finally everything finally falls into place.

I said at the beginning of these series, that when we find ourselves in moments of transformation, like the one we are in now as a community of faith, as individuals, as a nation, as a society, when we find ourselves in these moments of transformation, we are called to examine the pieces of what we expected, what we imagined, what we pictured life was supposed to like when everything finally fell into place. In figuring out what life is like now in this moment of transformation, we are called to move the pieces around, to create new patterns, to shift our understanding so that we can begin to see things differently. As people of faith, we do this moving around of the pieces because our faith teaches us that death does not have the last word. We do this creating of new patterns of behavior because our faith teaches us that love and light will always overcome. We do this shifting of our mindset because our faith teaches us there is always hope.

By moving the pieces around, by shifting our understanding of what was and what can be. By experiencing new patterns of behavior, by cultivating new mindsets, we are invited to reimagine our world, to reimagine the possibilities, to

reimagine what could happen, what can happen when healing and wholeness comes to all, comes for all.

This invitation to reimagine the possibilities is what Matthew is holding onto as he tells this story found within his Gospel. In our text for today, we discover not one but two healing narratives which tell of daughters being brought back to life. One daughter we are told is a little girl who has died. The other daughter is a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years, which has led to her being ritually unclean, another form of death here on earth.

In telling these two healing narratives, Matthew is using his Markan source and adapting the stories to reflect the needs of his community. Matthew's community no longer "fits" into their former lives which were connected with the synagogue. The picture of what they assumed their life would look like and what their life actually looks like in reality has created separation and isolation for them. It has led to them experiencing a form of death here on earth.

Everything they used to know no longer exists. They are needing to know that separation and isolation is not the last word, that there is still hope, that there is still a possibility of new life. And as they look at what they pictured life would be like and what life is like now, Matthew's community needs to know that they are still part of the larger whole connected to the Kingdom of God.

By telling these healing narratives of how these daughters were brought back to life, Matthew is inviting his community to create a new picture, to collect the seemingly broken pieces of what they imagined their lives would be and transform them into something new. Matthew is inviting them to reimage a different picture, a picture which reflects their new reality of community and relationships, many of which they would not have experienced in their "former" lives.

Again, like in the previous healing narratives, Matthew wants to show his community that healing can be so much more than just physical. It can be a spiritual healing, a spiritual renewal as well.

He does this by playing on a certain phrase to make his point. The phrase "made well" can also be translated as "save". "These words and actions connect the stories of the daughter and woman to the salvific story of Jesus' death and resurrection, giving his community concrete "images of death and destruction not having the last word but giving way to new life"

Matthew invites his readers to reimagine, reframe their narrative. Matthew invites his community to name the fact that sometimes what we imagined our lives would be is not where our lives are now. And trying to change that, trying to make everything work so that it fits that picture we have in our minds causes more stress. It drains our energy so much that we miss the new creation being formed in our

midst. Matthew wants his community, wants us to understand that the story of Jesus' life, ministry and resurrection teaches us that sometimes we have to let go so that new life can happen.

Or let me say it this way...Father Rohr tells us that transformation comes through great love or great suffering. I would argue that transformation can come through both at the same time. Because this Sunday marks the year anniversary of when our world shifted. A year ago, the lockdown due to the pandemic began. A year ago, Breonna Taylor was killed. A year ago Midway Christian Church began our journey as a virtual church. All of these instances changed what we assumed our life would be like in 2020. All of these instances are still changing what we assume our life will be like in 2021 and beyond.

In 2020, an awareness of inequality of health care, of wages, of quality of life came forward like never before. In 2020, an awareness of racial injustice removed the blinders for many in the white community who assumed that the Civil Rights Movement solved all the problems. And closer to home, I think if you had asked any one of us connected to Midway Christian Church in early March 2020 if we would see ourselves a year later, with cameras in the sanctuary, live-streaming to Facebook and YouTube, we would have said you were crazy. Yet, a year later, here we are, figuring out this new reality of a both/and church, figuring out this

new reality of what it will mean for us to be a community of WELCOME when people are back in the pews for Sunday morning worship while others in a completely different time zone are watching the service.

I will not pretend that this process of transformation as individuals, as a society, as a culture, as a community of faith has been easy. There has been frustration. There have been tears. There have been times when we wanted, when I wanted to give up...and that was just this past week. However, in this new beginning, a new picture of who we are, who we want to be as a nation, as a society, is starting to emerge. This is a new picture which imagines healing and wholeness, justice and mercy for all. is grounded For us as a community of faith, this new picture which is starting to emerge is grounded in the pattern of Jesus' ministry like never before, meaning that no longer are we expecting nor should we expect people to come to us on Sunday morning at 10:55 a.m. to receive God's grace. Now, because of this process of transformation, we are realizing that our mission of WELCOME calls us to meet people where they are, any time, any place, any where, something we should have probably realized and lived out all along.

Yet it took a moment of transformation, it took us letting go so that a new picture, so that new life could emerge for us to see that God has been, that God

continues to move in and among us, calling us to expand our understanding of what the Kingdom of God can be when it is fully realized here on Earth.

I don't have all the answers to how it will all work out just yet but I do know that like for Matthew's community, in this new beginning for Midway Christian, we are being invited to create new patterns of behavior, we are being invited to move the pieces around until they become beautiful works of art. In this new beginning for us as a nation, for us as a society but more importantly for us as a community of faith connected to Midway Christian Church, we are being invited to shift our understanding of what was and what can be. We are being invited to reimagine our world, to reimagine the possibilities, to reimagine what could happen, what can happen when healing and wholeness comes to all, comes for all. And if that is not the Gospel message being lived out, if that is not the Kingdom of God coming to fruition here on Earth just as it is in Heaven, then I don't know what is. Amen.