

**Sermon, Sept 5, 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
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*In the name of God, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.*

Several years ago, I was driving on the east coast. I had been in Washington, D.C., and was headed to North Carolina to visit my parents. I was on Interstate 95 in Virginia, a road surrounded on both sides by lush green trees and little farms. Along the way, I passed a caravan of five or six cars that grabbed my attention.

These were mostly cars that had been equipped with ramps and large backseats where a wheelchair could go. They all had license plates and tags to allow for parking in accessible spots. And they all had big signs in their windows and painted on the outside of their windows with that kind of paint you can use for a “just married” sign – and they all said “We are the Little Lobbyists!”

I had heard of this group. It is an organization made up of families who have children with “complex medical needs and disabilities.” Many of these children are in wheelchairs. Some of them use portable ventilators to breathe. Some have seizures, some are non-verbal. Many of them have had dozens of surgeries and hospitalizations before the age of 5. These are kids who require an intense amount of care. And together, their families advocate for the kind of medical treatment, specialized services, education, and accessible public spaces that they need. The group – the Little Lobbyists – shares their stories with legislators. Often they travel from across the country to Washington. The caravan on the highway that day had just been at the Capitol, and they were headed home.

As I passed one of the vans – I glanced over and looked at the driver. She was a woman just a little older than me. And I vividly remember the expression on her face. She was exhausted. But she also looked steely and determined as she led this caravan of specialized vans, filled with parents and kids down the road. And as I looked over, she glanced up and gave me a smile, a thumbs up, and pointed to one of the signs in her van window. I smiled and waved back before I drove on.

It was only a tiny interaction, but I will never forget that woman and the look on her face as she made the pilgrimage home.

I think of her and her family when I hear today’s Gospel reading from Mark.

Of course, this is a story about Jesus. And his acts of healing. But for me, the true protagonist of this story is the woman who comes to Jesus asking him to heal her daughter. It is her bravery, persistence, and belief in Jesus’s abundant healing power that is the center of our Gospel reading today. It is this woman who reminds me of the one in the van on I-95.

In this story, Jesus is tired. He doesn't want anyone to know he is there. He clearly wants a break. And yet, the woman finds him. She immediately approaches him and asks him to heal her daughter. And Jesus responds in a way that can only be called harsh. "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Now, different people unpack Jesus's answer in different ways. Some say he was testing her faith. Or that he needed her to make a compelling case for healing. Or that his answer reflects his determination to first serve his own Israelite people rather than those of other faiths. Some say he was just tired and having a bad day. But no matter what, it was a tough reply for the woman to get.

I think it would throw me for a loop. Heck, I stew on it when someone cuts me off in traffic, or a family member is short with me. And yet, in the face of Jesus's refusal, the woman persists. She doesn't back down. She even thinks quickly enough to turn his own language back at him. "Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

This moment reminds me of one of my favorite stories from the Old Testament – of Jacob wrestling with the angel. This woman is willing to wrestle with Jesus. She knows Jesus could heal. She believes in a more hopeful, healthy future for her daughter. She has faith in the abundance of God– she doesn't believe that the gift of healing should be given only to a few. She is here to get her blessing, come hell or high water. And she is willing to go to the mat for it.

And Jesus relents. He tells her that her daughter has been healed. She returns home, and finds that indeed it is true.

This is a powerful encounter all on its own. But I think it is also important to note that after this encounter with the woman, Jesus goes on to do more.

We see in our reading for today that he restores hearing to a man who is deaf. In the next chapters from Mark he multiplies loaves and fishes and restores sight to a blind man.

As I read this story, I imagine an exhausted Jesus, worn down by carrying a heavy load who just needs a break. I think about the woman who, with such determination and faith, demands and receives healing for her daughter. And I wonder if, in fact, there is some healing in this encounter for Jesus as well. I wonder if the woman's steely faith and her relentless belief in a more hopeful future for her child might have actually revived this tired Messiah. That her response, her request, her faith actually opened *him* up in a new way. We'll never know. But perhaps this moment – this interaction with this woman – not only results in the healing of her daughter, but also brings new life to Jesus's ministry.

I know that in moments when I'm tired or burned out or fed up with other people, I think of that woman on the road from Washington, D.C. I remember the mix of exhaustion and determination in her eyes, and the way she pointed out her sign to me. She was clearly tired. Her trip was not easy. But in that moment, I could see a deep reservoir of something that allowed her to keep

going. Like the woman in today's lesson, she held a deep, enduring belief that something better was possible. A belief that sprang out of love for her child, her family, and others who were struggling. A willingness to witness for her child under any circumstances.

In her, and in the woman from today's Gospel, I believe we have a glimpse of the relationship between love, faith, and hope. These women loved their children deeply. So deeply that they held onto the faith that things could – and would – get better. And from that faith -- that belief in a better future – a deep hopefulness was born. A hope that legislators would listen to her story. A hope that Jesus would heal her daughter. A hope in God's abundant love for us.

This week, I invite you to think about the woman from our Gospel story. To think about the well of love, of faith, and of hope in her. About the holy place in her where she found the strength to keep asking Jesus for the healing she *knew* he could provide, even after he told her "no."

And I invite you to try to listen for that quiet, deep place in yourself.

Because like this woman in the story, and like the woman leading the caravan, I believe we all have this place in us. God's presence in us is a holy place of love. Love for our families, our communities, and the world around us. It is a place that we can draw from to remain faithful in the face of the incredible challenges of the world.

So what does that place feel like for you? How do you listen for it, look for it, try to feel it?

This week, I invite you into a practice of listening for that deep reservoir of love in you.

I also invite you to consider joining one of the spiritual listening groups that will begin this fall at St. John's. These will be places where you can practice – with a small group of other people – the art of spiritual listening. Of looking inside yourself for that well of love and that reservoir of faith that we all carry within us.

Let us pray that we all may both find and be found by the kind of love, hopefulness, and belief in God's abundance that we see in these women. And that through these gifts, we find the healing that we seek.

*Amen.*