

## Hello this is Pastor Matthew Woods and this our Daily Update for Friday, March 20

When you enter the main doors of Grace Lutheran Church there is a copy of a painting of Jesus crucified on the cross. It's a dark, somber painting meant to reflect on the depth Jesus' sacrifice for our sins. It is reflective of the darkness of Good Friday from noon to three as Jesus hung there. I love art and admire this painting as one of my favorites. But I have to be honest I saw our copy of the painting on the entrance wall but really never looked that close until recently. Like most I usually just hustle in and out of the door and rarely, if at all, look up to see it. Last fall that all changed. When we went to St. Louis with our Confirmands I connected the dots. I've been here nearly twenty years and Last Fall I finally discovered why it looked so vaguely familiar to me.



We walked into the old Cathedral in St. Louis down by the Arch and right up in front, hanging on the wall behind the marble altar is a larger copy of Diego Velazquez's *Christ Crucified* 1632 (*The original hangs in the Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain*). I admire this painting and enjoy seeing it again when we visit every two years. This year however, when I came home I became aware that our painting over the door is a smaller copy of that same painting in St. Louis. I don't have to go to St. Louis to see it again. I am now paying attention and now fully aware that it has been with us this whole time. All I have to do is take the time to look up to see it before I rush out the door.

Being aware is always helpful and can be very rewarding. Awareness depends on information and observation, with a dose of knowledge and wisdom. Right now doctors around the world are gathering information to become more aware of the extent of the Coronavirus. Vaccines for known illnesses like the different strains of the Flu have been developed because smart people have learned about them. Experience has also taught us how to deal with them. Learning takes time; time for testing; time to gather results; and lots of patience. Awareness has been the hardest part of dealing with coronavirus precisely because there are still so many unknowns. We know a whole lot more about the virus than just a week ago and therefore we are taking action differently than we did a week ago. With patient endurance I believe these talented medical people will be blessed with the wisdom to become sufficiently more informed about this virus to develop a vaccine. Buying them the time needed to explore and learn is the challenge immediately in front of us because we are in a hurry get past this. But with time it is more likely the secrets of the virus will not stay hidden.

One of my favorite people that we meet in scripture is the woman in Luke 8:42-48. I admire her courage and faith to humbly reach out for Jesus' hem. She believed as many did in her day that even the hem of His garment would bring healing but she is the only one I know of that took action to follow through. She had been suffering for twelve years with an illness no one else could cure. It was a humiliating illness with all kinds of social realities tied to it. The illness made her unclean and probably ruined any chance of marriage or children. Within this crowd of people, this woman used what strength she had left to reach Jesus. The rest crowded around Him and no one noticed this woman struggling to get closer. "If I just touch the hem of his garment" she thought, "I will be healed". She succeeds. And immediately she is healed. She can feel it. She couldn't remember feeling that good. And just as quickly as she is healed Jesus stops everything and asks who touched Him because He sensed power had gone out from Him.

Suddenly the woman that no one noticed is front and center and everyone notices. Jesus doesn't scold her or punish her but praises her, and celebrates her faith which was bold enough to reach out to the Lord in a crowd. Within this crowd Jesus notices this courageous woman—she literally stands out. When no one else is aware Jesus certainly is.

Please note that this woman seems to be aware of what everyone else didn't fully see. She pursued Jesus as the Messiah who heals, not just as a rabbi who did miracles. She believed in Jesus and her faith was as commendable as the Centurion of Luke 7:1-10 or of the Gentile woman of Matthew 15:21-28. It seems she was way ahead of the disciples. She is so unique that Jesus stops everything to praise her act of faith. This is why she is one of my favorite people in scripture and why she stands out in a crowd and be written about in scripture.

**It only takes one to stand out to teach and inspire others**

What does this teach us? First, like this woman's example of faithful diligence and endurance, *it only takes one to stand out to teach and inspire others*. It only takes one breakthrough to change everything. And just as this woman sought out Jesus unlike anyone at that time—in our time somewhere, someone will see what others hadn't spotted yet. Then the whole game changes for everyone. All it takes is one person to spot it. All it takes is one person to stand out to teach the rest. And then we will all know. We will learn. Then we will know much more clearly how the virus works and what we can do to overcome it.

Here's another point. Faith for some of us opens up to us in the same way. Our breakthroughs often happen under specific conditions and at certain times. Even as adults our Lord is using "Teachable moments". The disciples spent three years learning from Jesus but the greatest lesson—the breakthrough didn't come until Easter. Jesus announced three times He was to be sacrificed on the cross and then on the third day rise again. Yet none of the disciples expected a living Savior on Easter. Good Friday was a mess of emotions and of disciples in hiding in fear being next. After Easter Sunday, the disciples finally understood—finally they were fully aware of the whole picture and purpose of Jesus' crucifixion. Then--then they were ready to witness to everyone about Jesus and eventually their teaching was known to the world.

Yesterday the President announced that there may be a breakthrough with some medicines that are already on the market. Could this be like the painting I mentioned earlier. Could an answer be in front of us the whole time. Maybe these meds will work. Maybe not. Maybe something else will be needed. The point is soon we will know more and tomorrow we will be wiser and with patience a solution will be developed. That's how it works. That's the process of awareness.

The woman we mentioned from Luke 8 captured the picture of our day; Facing an illness, isolated, wondering how long, and will things ever be normal. Somewhere she heard reports of a cure—in her case Jesus. Perhaps this is a time to learn not only about our health. Maybe this is a teachable moment for us to learn more about faith in Jesus. Maybe something in all of this is meant to drive us deeper into His Word and tap into places found only when we are challenged. And maybe it will be something that has been with us the whole time. Chances are if we just look up we already discover Jesus has been there the whole time, like the painting hanging over the main doors of the church entrance. Maybe what we are to gain is not very definable right now, but perhaps whatever we are to gain will make much more sense later on as we become more aware and made more wise.

So the next time you enter the church I encourage you to look up above the doors. See if you can spot the crucified Christ, who's been there the whole time—through thick and thin.

And the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with His favor and give you His peace.

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