

## **St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Eastport – Guest Sermon for June 30, 2024**

Based on 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 and Mark 5:21-43

Thank you, St Luke's, for the opportunity to offer this message today. I join you in honoring this last day of PRIDE month for 2024, and I join you in seeking the eternal truth of today's readings for our time and our place.

I come to you today representing The Center of Help, el Centro de Ayuda, which has been a part of Annapolis for over 20 years. The Center exists to help the immigrant find their way in Annapolis and in Anne Arundel county, in an unfamiliar and too often indifferent and too often hostile culture. The rules are often against them, and they are often considered a burden, an annoyance. Just like a hemorrhaging woman or a loudly grieving father, there is often no place for them to go, and they are told to be silent.

Now I am not saying that the Center of Help is Jesus or that we work miracles, but I will tell you from my own experience that it is a place where miracles can happen, particularly miracles of love. It is a place where way is made for the presence of the eternal Christ, invisible to us in the normal ways of seeing, and fully present in the liminal spaces between us and around us.

I want to share with you some of my experiences with the Center of Help. I will start with the volunteers, who are people from throughout Anne Arundel County and from all sorts of walks of life, with our own origin stories and our own burdens, who come together to provide both presence and opportunity for our clients. Volunteers teach and care and accompany our clients on their journeys. We listen. We welcome. We are better people when we are together, and we know, we can feel, that there is something different and sacred when we are together. I can't call

it church, but I can call it a place blessed with the presence of ever-present and ever-hidden Divine Love, flowing from us and around us and to us and among us.

We know that our clients come to us for help – whether it is translating and understanding the meaning of legal documents or figuring out what that bill from the emergency room means and how to deal with it to dealing with their child having difficulties in school or with their own legal and immigration and health and family troubles. They come to us with few resources, not understanding how things work here, often struggling with the language, and often not able to access the benefits we citizens take for granted, including the right to work and access to health care.

In this way, are they so different from Jarius, the grieving father, whose familiar world had no answers to offer as his daughter lay dying. Are they so different from the woman with a hemorrhage, by definition of which she was a social outcast, unclean, failed by both her culture and the medicine it offered. Yet both of them had heard a rumor, a rumor of help and hope, embodied in this man from Nazareth who we now recognize as Jesus the Christ, the anointed one, the ever present yet hidden embodiment of the hope and blessing and even miracles of God among us. Jesus the Christ, who had just come from healing the man we know as the Gerasene demonic, living like a wild man among the tombs outside his village, whose people had tried to chain him because he was so alien to them, who had no way of remedying that which plagued him. Society has no way of dealing with any of this. Yet the demons plaguing the demonic recognized the God in Jesus, and Jarius and the woman with a hemorrhage had heard the rumors, and in their desperation they sought him out when that was the only hope left. And Jesus responded, giving of himself, of the Divine in him, spreading it out to them, healing them, and encouraging them to return to their life.

Am I saying a bit of this happens at the Center of Help? Yes, that is exactly what I am saying. And it happens for more than the clients. It happens for the volunteers and the staff as well. Something is different when we join together, hearing and caring and sharing and letting something flow among us and through us. Whenever I go to the Center of Help, some of the soul sickness that plaques me is lifted. I go to help solve problems and to meet people or sometimes to just serve, but I am the one who comes away a little more healed. I walk in the door and see families, often with both parents and their youngsters all together, and I know I am in a different kind of place. I race to the Center to see if there is anything I can do to help with serious problem, and I see babies and am able to hold them and they sometimes grab my little finger, and I am healed. Our volunteers come in to teach English to people with no understanding of the language, and they build friendships and community. They help people become citizens, if that is possible, and those people come back and help other people.

Are we church? Maybe we are, in a way. Is God there? For me, yes, even in the most desperate of times. And here is my secret; sometimes I go to the Center, a place where one would think the world would weigh most heavily, to escape the world and to find agape love. I go when I am hopeless, and hope finds me. I go in faith, and I am fulfilled. What Jesus said is true. In each case, it is our faith that saves us.

And now I turn to Paul's epistle. Paul was asking funds for the mother church in Jerusalem, which was poor. He begins by pointing out how Jesus gave of himself for the sake of others, for our sake. Remember how He felt the strength go from Him when the woman with a hemorrhage touched his hem, yet He welcomed this unclean woman and recognized her faith. Paul reminds us that we too have the chance to give of ourselves and to let the healing presence of the eternal Christ flow through us to others. I remind you that we too are healed when we willingly engage

in this giving, this outflowing and inflowing and through flowing of the Divine Love and Divine Healing. For, as Paul reminds us, in the Kingdom of God, the riches and abundance of all sorts of gifts are shared until all have what they need.

I know we are all called differently. I am called to the Center of Help. You might not be. But I beg you to be attuned to where you are called and how you are called; and, for your own sake, to attend to that calling. My faith tells me that there will be healing for each of us when we attend to that calling, and that we will spread healing.

I am thankful and praise St. Lukes and God for the many ways you have as a congregation heard a call and spread healing. You have heard the call of the Earth and of those who are remote from its intrinsic healing power and have created a sanctuary that restores the Earth and those who come into the outdoor sanctuary. You have heard the pain of those who do not fit into the neatly defined strictly hetero-cis-binary definitions of love and gender, and you have opened your doors and your hearts and hung a PRIDE flag. That matters. It matters a lot. You have heard the pleas of the immigrant and you have given us opportunities in your time, your space, your worship services, and your festivals. That too matters.

And now, to the extent possible, I, like Paul, ask you to continue giving from your abundance of excellence and heart. The Center of Help needs help. For reasons I cannot understand, I was called, and I know I am inadequate. No small nonprofits in Annapolis have enough to keep going without generous donations. The funding of the COVID years has dried up. We are desperate and looking for our miracles. I ask you to be part of our miracle, and I invite you to join us in experiencing that miracle.

Whatever you have to give, in time or money or prayer, I thank you. I thank Rev. Bloom and the vestry for making it possible for me to join you today. I thank you for offering space for our volunteer-led programs. I thank you for your care. I thank you for your kindness. I thank God for the faith the keeps us going and for those who can hold the faith and share it when I lose mine in times of despair. I pray for healing for all of us.

Annapolis is small. Anne Arundel County is small. If you care, I will share with you after worship some of the many healing connections I know and have experienced with St. Luke's. For me, this too is a healing place. For both myself, personally, and for The Center of Help, thank you for being here and for all the healing you offer both within your boundaries and outside these walls.