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Rest That Revives

The sanctuary had floor to ceiling windows on two of its four sides. Whether we were following the cross processing in, or back out again-- there was the world. Right there. In that worship space there was no escaping God's good and fragile earth. People would walk by, birds would look in, and the occasional siren would blend their sounds with that of the liturgy, like another stop on the organ. The gifts and needs of the world were easy to see. Sometimes distractions could become opportunities, not only for prayers but for action. Like the boundaries between the house and the street would disappear. You could see right through the walls.

The space/community itself lifted our eyes beyond ourselves. High enough to see what was going on out there, or in front of us. We can too easily become hunched over in our hearts. Stuck in our own rhythms and practices. We can miss the person right beside us or in our pew neighborhood. I don't know what we would name the spirit that keeps us from noticing the ones in our midst who have come to reveal God's reign. Sin. Fear. The way it's always been. Just stuck in our routines. Heads down. Her body was hunched over, but what if the rest of us missed out on what she had to offer the whole time.

Jesus often shows up disguised as a stranger. In signs of the opposite. In bodies unlike our own but like his. Broken, cast aside, ignored. I wonder how many times she had shown up. In eighteen years. Faithful persistence personified. She carves out space for herself. Who have you seen do that? Against all odds. Their faith fuels yours. When you see them there- faithful, stalwart, always.

Jesus sees her. Notices her. Draws near. Lays his hands on her. She is set free and reminded who she is and always has been. With touch and truth she is healed. She now stands straight up. Healing on the sabbath. This is what Jesus does. He is the one who notices. Who always sees. Comes close. Gives you a future. Speaks words that cut through the noise.

My mentor introduced me to the poem St. Francis and the Sow, with the line, "sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness." In touch and in truth. Among other things Jesus did this. In the gathered assembly.

In the liturgy we recall many things. The truth of our own curved inwardness. Bondage to sin. The futility of our attempts to save ourselves.

Is it not to also reteach a thing its loveliness. To speak to each other: you belong. You matter. Your sins are forgiven. You are a child of God. God is not ashamed of you. Christ lays his hands on you as he places his very body in yours. Not withholding anything. You are loved. In his death and resurrection he makes it so. The cross indelibly traced on you is the sign. Tomorrow can be different from today. Where else can we speak those words to one another? Not on social media doom loops, 24/7 news cycles, or corporate ladders. Who has done that for you? Hand on brow. With authority. Retaught you your own loveliness. What does that sound like to your flesh and heart?

We know that God has got us. The only death that we need to fear is behind us. Our loveliness comes from outside ourselves. We realize that in our own flesh-- we are standing upright in Christ. How might we do this for others? In this assembly and out there too. Standing straight up in God's love how might we help others stand, even as they help us. In this mutual dance of grace. We are broken symbols around his broken body. That's the gift of it all.

Our standing upright is always for the sake of the world. That's who we see when we are no longer hunched over. We notice them, not just ourselves. We interpret our community, gathering and sending, rites, and rituals through the windows of the cross. So they foster healing in touch and truth. On the sabbath and always. Free to notice others. Both within and outside. We are freed from self-centered schemes and graced into blessed self-forgefulness. This is what a community of the wounded does.

Acceptable worship with reverence and awe? We find in Isaiah that it's not about outward appearance of piety, styles, patterns of liturgy, deep thoughts about glory- but offering food to the hungry, satisfying needs of the afflicted, removing the pointing of the finger.

Reverence for one another and all- in whom Christ resides. Freedom. You know it. "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood, and with his innocent suffering and death."

Free to live turned to our neighbors. This is Lutheranism. In Christ I lack nothing-- so I will give everything for others. Shared. Never hoarded.

In the sanctuary and out-- windows or not-- sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness. Hand on brow and retell in words and in touch it is lovely. Or be retaught ourselves by another. Truth and touch.

Just keep showing up helping each other stand straight up.

