

September 6, 2020

Luke 8:42b-48

It is Labor Day Weekend. This marks the end of summer and the beginning of fall activities. This weekend calendar pause is supposed to be a chance to catch our breaths and prepare for a new season. Amicable's Worship Team decided that in the coming fall season it is important to continue to raise justice issues, but, because these issues too often frustrate and upset us, we must try to accentuate the positive.

This is not always easy as looking at the injustices in our world can be a downer, since the systemic nature of most justice issues seem beyond our control and therefore unchangeable. The truth is, though, there are positive things happening – here at Amicable Church and in the greater Tiverton community. So, beginning today and for the next couple of months we are going to try to highlight justice issues and how people are working toward positive change.

On this Labor Day Weekend we thought Amicable's thrift store would be a great place to begin, which is why we are recording parts of this service in A.C.T.S. – an acronym for Amicable Church's Thrift Store. There are two justice issues being raised here: economic justice and women's rights. I begin with today's scripture lesson.

You might wonder what Jesus' healing of the woman's hemorrhage has to do with justice issues, but sit with the story a little. Jesus is in a crowd, which is pushing in on him because everyone wants to touch him, everyone wants to be close to this person of power. I imagine, given the societal norms of the time, it was a crowd of mostly men, as women were not really allowed out in public without a male escort.

Yet we know from the story a woman was there; a woman who was probably a societal outcast, as she had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. In faith and desperation she reaches out to touch Jesus and is healed. Jesus stops and looks for the person who touched him. It says a lot that Jesus doesn't know or see who it was. It tells me Jesus doesn't see the woman, because women are all too often invisible to men. It seems to me Jesus is surprised when the woman confesses she is the one who touched him. Two things to note: Jesus recognizes the woman was made well by her faith and Jesus acknowledges women in a new way, as people of faith. For Jesus, faith is no longer an exclusively male domain.

Whether or not it was this encounter that changed Jesus, his ministry was unique in the role women played in it. He spoke and dealt with women on what appears to be equal footing with men. It was women who were his primary source of income and women shared in leadership roles, at least at the beginning of the early church movement. As the institutional church got established, women were pushed back into secondary roles. They were no longer equals in and of the faith.

The societal, and church discrimination against women has been as great an injustice. In preparing for this service I came across a quote by Margaret Thatcher: "If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman." Despite the discrimination women faced and continue to face in life, the church exists still today because women of faith are working just as hard or harder than the men.

Amicable Church took a leap of faith when they went against societal norms and hired the Rev. Dr. Sarah Dixon in

1929. In her decade of service she helped to put Amicable Church on a solid financial foundation for the first time in its almost two hundred years of existence. While at that time and through the 1950's the official offices of the church were filled by men (except Sunday School Superintendent), women shared equally leadership roles when it came to teaching and fundraising.

This tradition of women's leadership continues still today. One of Amicable's most vital ministries at the moment is our thrift store. It was the vision of Gale Gabriel and Martha MacNaught. They saw in its creation a two-fold purpose: to raise funds in support of Amicable Church and to offer the community clothes and household goods at very affordable prices.

When A.C.T.S. began the economy was booming. We had no idea how needed a thrift store like A.C.T.S. was going to be. In this difficult-for-some economic times our very reasonable prices help stretch the limited dollars for many in our community. A.C.T.S. has been an important support for many in the face of the deep economic divide in our country.

There is yet another justice issue connected to A.C.T.S. that I have become aware of in the last month. As you can tell by now through the backdrop of this virtual worship service, we are buried in merchandise. While we are grateful for those who share so generously with us, the tsunami of "stuff" is a reminder of a world that over-produces, turning us into a throwaway culture. Our landfills cannot hold it all.

Recycling, reusing, is a justice issue as well.

None of this would be possible, if it weren't for the hard work and long hours of women. True, there are some men that help with the heavy lifting. Most of them, though, are the good men behind every great woman.

I am proud of all the positive coming out of our thrift store. I am also aware of how much work it really is. So here is a brief advertisement: volunteers are needed. There are things you can do at home. There is lots to be done in the church store itself. Whether you have an hour or much more, please reach out to A.C.T.S. and offer your service of time and talent.

I have one footnote to add to all of this. When the woman touched the fringe of Jesus' clothes, he did not see her. When I first heard the vision of this thrift store, I was not supportive. I did not want to lose the kitchen or the dining room. Like Jesus, I have been moved by the faith Gale and Martha had in their vision and grateful for all the labor they have put in.

A.C.T.S. is a ministry of our church that has been vision-ed and brought to life by the labor of women. It serves as a small but mighty remedy to the economic imbalance in our society and a challenge to "gluttony of things" that produces so much waste and hurts our environment.

On this Labor Day Weekend, as we rest from our labor, renewing our bodies and our minds, I thank God for the many ways the women of Amicable Church lead us in paths of justice and peace. Amen.