

Dear friends in Christ



St. Francis Episcopal Mission Outreach

Rev. Dr. John C. Forney
Pentecost 15, September 5, 2021
Proper 18

“A Woman on a Mission”

isaiah 35:4-7; Psalm 146;
James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17; Mark 7:24-37

“You are not a horse. You are not at cow. Seriously, y’all. Stop it.” This was the tweet from the FDA on why you should not use Ivermectin to treat or prevent COVID-19. Desperation is raging through our nation, rampaging like Hurricane Ida, along with this pandemic¹.

Feed stores all across the country are reporting that sales of this drug to deworm horses and cattle have skyrocketed. Tucker Carlson and others on Fox News have been censured for promoting this drug as a cure for COVID-19. Groups on Facebook are promoting it as a treatment. Sales reaching 88,000 prescriptions of this dewormer per week. Texas, alone, reporting a 550% spike in poison calls from the ingestion of this drug. Filling scarce ICU beds needed for Covid patients. And so useless. Almost 90% of these folks were unvaccinated. “Y’all stop it!”

¹ U.S. FDA tweet, @US FDA, August 21, 2021.

This takes us back to the Bad Old Days when a group of quack doctors and Trump were promoting hydroxychloroquine as a new miracle cure. You remember the bogus group, America's Frontline Doctors. These were the first to promote the hydroxychloroquine cure. Their spokeswoman was that very same doctor who had been asserting that ovarian cysts were caused by people having sex in their dreams with demons and witches. You know -- the woman who said the government was run in part by humans and "reptilians and other aliens."

And this group of crazy even got a hearing before the president and vice president. "I thought she was still very impressive," the Donald concluded after the visit. Reptilian overlords and all.

And all the while, a safe, effective cure has been available. Free. At CVS or Walgreens.

But many, for ideological reasons, peer pressure or ignorance, (who knows?) won't take the vaccine. So, out of sheer desperation they've turned to snake oil. "You are not a horse. You are not a cow. Seriously, y'all. Stop it."

I guess the upside to this quack cure is, if you had worms, you don't now.

Desperation drives all sorts of behavior. Some well founded. Some absolutely off the charts. It was out of such desperation that a foreigner approached Jesus concerning her daughter's demon possession. Women in that place and time did not approach men. It was unseemly. Especially for a foreigner, a Syrophenician. We have our ways. You best mind them. Stay in your place, woman.

When asked for healing for her daughter, Jesus' response is a slap across the face. "One does not give the children's food to the dogs." At this she should have slunk quietly away, her cheeks burning with embarrassment.

But this woman persists. "Even the dogs are allowed to gather the scraps under the table." She's got him there. She was a first century Molly Ivins, Katie Porter, Barbara Jordan, Liz Cheney and

Elizabeth Warren – all rolled up into one. Nasty Woman on a mission!

This interchange opens a whole raft of possible questions about Jesus. We don't usually associate snarky with him. But then, we don't associate violence with him either – like beating the hell out of a bunch of greedy money changers at the temple doorstep..

So, let's leave the theological speculation aside and accept the story as we have it. This woman was the prod to widen his vision. Grace, healing, compassion – these are boundless. Not the property of any one tribe. Her mission to save her daughter enlarged his vision. A moment of Grace.

Like Dr. Seuss's Grinch, Jesus' heart grew one size larger. Out of the desperation of this mother, comes a great religious epiphany. ALL means ALL. That's the whole story about Divine Love.

It is out of this gospel compassion that many tirelessly worked amid danger to evacuate U.S. personnel and Afghans at Kabul. Though the danger was palpable, these folks put their lives on the line. Literally, it turns out for thirteen of our service members.

Behind the scenes, in desperation, many more stateside worked untold hours to save Afghan friends and colleagues. The same desperation as that of the Syrophoenician mother with a demon possessed daughter. That airlift effort was of a kind with the Great Compassion embodied in today's gospel lesson.

Sadly, we didn't reach all our friends. We failed to save many of the most vulnerable, women and girls facing a bleak future of forced servitude and a waste of talents. Many stories of heartbreak I find troubling. The former president even blocked the processing of visas for these allies for months on end. Stephen Miller is still ranting about letting these folks in. The very same desperate people, many of whom saved our butts at great risk to their own lives. Literally!

I read the anonymous email of one Afghan man² and his family attempting to make it through the crush at airport gates. Syavash, an Afghan journalist for over fifteen years, his wife, Sarah, “one of the first women to attend medical school after the fall of the Taliban in her province of Parwan” – she was one of the first woman doctors in Afghanistan. They and their two sons, finally gave up after thirteen hours in the most inhuman conditions – wading through sewage that flooded the street, enduring the insults and beatings of Taliban security, the scorching heat and dust. It finally became too much.

“My wife was hit with a stick several times and so were numerous other people. They threw water on us and repeatedly said, ‘Your owners, your masters, the Westerners abandoned you.’

“My wife, who suffers from severe back pain was hit so many times and I could only beg, ‘Please don’t hit her. She is a woman and she is sick.’

“Pasoon may only be 7 years old but he knows what is going on around him. He kept saying, ‘Let’s go home. I will tell the Taliban to take two of my toy cars and don’t hurt my father and mother.’”

The Spirit, moving through this family’s desperation, can move us here, we who can do something helpful. Might even move the Taliban to recognize our bond of a common humanity. I hear that they have in secret been working with the CIA to continue to spirit Americans to the Hamid Karzai International Airport, even past the August deadline.

It was out of this same Great Compassion that many were led to save and shelter these vulnerable Afghans. It is who we are at our best. Spirit incarnated.

Yet even Jesus could not feed or heal everyone. Nor could we extract everyone in those past several weeks at that besieged

² Anonymous, “What it’s like for an Afghan family trying to make it to the Kabul airport,” Yahoo News, August 29, 2001

airport. In these last hours of desperation, we failed ourselves. We failed many friends -- and we're just not in His class.

Left with "thoughts and prayers," we are not helpless – if that same Great Compassion which moves through these prayers, is emboldened and enfleshed, Spirit empowered, these "thoughts and prayers" can work healing and welcome. As my friend David often quotes Alfred North Whitehead, "Ideas won't keep; something must be done about them."

I called my friend Anne, another woman on a mission, who is part of **Newcomers Access Center**,³ working to get these refugees safely resettled here in America, asking her how we at Pilgrim Place might be of help. "Of course, money always helps," she quickly responded. But we can do more. Much more.

We can tutor these folks in English, our women can take Afghan women shopping and to other appointments. We can help in finding housing – hopefully at our almost empty United Methodist seminary in Claremont.

You can donate a car in good running condition. You can be a long-term friend of an Afghan family. Contact them twice a week or so, plan a picnic. And definitely practice English all the time.

Money, for certain, always helps, and you can donate through the Newcomers Access website. – www.newcomersaccesscenter.org

Don't worry, Anne's making a list. If you live outside Southern California, we can connect you with groups working in your local area to welcome these new neighbors. Most churches have a connection to an organization in their denomination that is responding to the needs of these new refugees.

If the One of Great Compassion touches your heart deep down to where your mojo is, do what the Spirit is whispering to you. Now.

Just as Jesus grew in Spirit in the instant of that mother's rejoinder -- grew to include those not of his tribe or religious clique, so might we. Eternally, he comes to us in the face of the dispossessed

³ www.newcomeraccesscenter.org, (909) 455-3248, 401 N. Gibbs Street, Pomona, CA 91767.

seeking refuge. As a refugee in Egypt fleeing Herod's wrath. So, now he does here in America.

James Baldwin put it this way about the bond of our common humanity -- about the working of that Great Compassion among us:

"For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; The earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out."⁴
Amen.

⁴ James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 393.