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Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26
June 11, 2023

The Message I Share
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As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax-collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' But when he heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, 'My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.' And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.' Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, 'Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.' And instantly the woman was made well. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, 'Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.

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For centuries, maybe longer, religious faith, Christian faith, has been weaponized against all sorts of different people: women, people of different faiths or no faith at all, academics, people of color, people with mental illness, and, of course, the LGBTQ+ community. The forced conversion of masses of people, the unjust acquisition of native lands, colonialism, slavery, inquisitions, pogroms, crusades, and too many wars to count have all been justified in the name of religion. And, still today, people use faith as a front for bigotry, heaven as a rationalization for unhappiness here and now, God's will as a stand-in for their agenda, and the Bible as a battering ram to beat down anyone who disagrees with their views. You all know this.

And yet, here we are, sitting in a church on a Sunday morning in Aurora, Illinois. What would we say to all those folks lining up to march in the Pride Parade this morning? What's the message our presence is meant to convey when we join them? Is it, "we're not like those other church people?" Is it, "we're more enlightened than those other church people?" Or, is it, "we're more desperate for new members than those other church people and we'll take anyone!?" No, I don't think it's any of those, do you? Besides, I don't think any of those messages would come off as particularly good news to the folks we'll be marching with. Churches are supposed to have good news to share.

As a formerly gay kid...formerly a kid that is, not formerly gay...still gay...As a gay kid growing up in a conservative evangelical household, I wondered what the church's message was for me. Was it that I was somehow broken or misguided; that I could and should get fixed; that I was a sinner in the eyes of an angry God; that I was going to hell?

You see, I really needed the church to have a message for me that was really about me and not about them, about their church being different from other churches, or more enlightened than other churches, or more desperate for members than other churches. I needed the church to have a message for me, about me. What is our message to all those folks lining up right now to march in the Pride Parade? You can be sure they're

hearing messages from others so what's our message for them going to be?

As much as I'd like to give you the answer, that really does feel like cheating! Besides, I'm positive that there's more than one right answer to this question. The best I can do today is to share what I want *my* message to be for them. I want them to hear this:

"I see you. I affirm you. I love you. I celebrate with you, and walk with you, and work with you. You complete my community because the beautiful, colorful, and queer piece of the puzzle that you are, is exactly the one we didn't have before you were part of it. Because of you, I see in greater color and clarity the very face of God, with us."

What's *your* message for them? Your congregation's message for them? Let's make sure it's actually good news *for them*.

May it be so.

Amen.