

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 14, 2025
9:30 AM

Text: Luke 8:40-56

Theme: The Art of Hospitality: The Ministry of Notice

[prayer]

Have you ever experienced a spiritual nudging to do something, especially something you know is right and good but makes you a little uncomfortable?

Some years ago, I was leaving the grocery store. It was summer and I had a full cart of groceries that needed to be refrigerated, including a container of ice cream. As I exited, I walked by a young woman standing outside the automatic doors balancing a toddler on her hip. She was holding a sign asking for help; her child needed diapers.

I hesitated. I thought about the ice cream and other cold items in my cart. I thought about the list of things I needed to do that day. I am also, at my core, a shy person. I mostly avoid talking to strangers. Those three things combined convinced me to keep pushing my cart toward my car. I loaded all the groceries into the backseat, got behind the wheel, put my car in reverse, and began to back out of the parking lot.

But as I shifted into drive, I heard the Holy Spirit say very quietly yet distinctly, “I want you to stop and go back. The ice cream will keep.”

I am not always obedient to the promptings of the Spirit, but the clarity of this command was undeniable. I parked my car, got out, and walked back toward the store entrance. As I approached, I noticed a store employee was asking the woman to leave. He explained it was against store policy for her to be soliciting help that close to the entrance. She was making customers uncomfortable.

The woman was clearly embarrassed and on the verge of tears. As she turned to leave, I swallowed my discomfort, walked right up to her and asked, “What size diapers do you need?” Then I went inside, bought the diapers, and withdrew some cash for her as well. The extra expense easily doubled my grocery bill that day. But the spiritual lesson I learned was priceless. When we prioritize obeying the Holy Spirit over our personal agendas or comfort, we can become a conduit of God’s hospitality and care to others.

It sounds like such a simple, even obvious, thing. I wish I hadn’t needed the Holy Spirit to prompt me that day at all; I wish I had made the decision to help that woman simply because it was the kind and generous thing to do. I know that I have missed out on countless opportunities to serve and love my neighbor because I couldn’t be bothered to stop what I was doing. Worse, there are all the times I haven’t even *noticed* my neighbor.

Today we continue our series on “The Art of Hospitality” by concentrating on what we call “the ministry of notice.” Last week as we listened to the stories of Abraham and Jesus showing hospitality, I remarked that biblical hospitality requires being present to one another, giving each other our full and undivided attention. When we notice someone else, we are saying, “I see you. You matter.”

The art of hospitality begins with the art of noticing. Debi Nixon writes, “Churches that practice biblical hospitality NOTICE. They notice the stranger, they notice the person in need, they notice when something needs attention...There is no hospitality until we first notice.”¹

Noticing takes situational awareness. And that awareness requires a commitment to the present moment above all else. I don’t know about you, but I spend a lot of time thinking about the future – the next hour, next day, next week, next month. Our culture rewards us for being future oriented. Well-ordered busyness, with our planners and calendars and to-do lists, is seen as a virtue.

But our focus on the future can distract from the present. And to be present to others, to offer them the kind of compassionate hospitality that Jesus offers,

¹ Debi Nixon in *The Art of Hospitality Companion Book: A Practical Guide for a Ministry of Radical Welcome* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2024), 30.

means we must be giving the present moment – with its real people and real needs – *at least as* much attention and care as we give the future.

Frequently we are too distracted or preoccupied to notice the opportunity God has put right in front of us to welcome and serve the stranger in our midst. The ministry of notice requires us to slow down and pay attention. It is only when we slow down enough to notice those around us that we feel those nudges from the Holy Spirit, hear her promptings, and allow God to use us as conduits of His hospitality and care.

Jesus knew how to move through life slowly enough to pay attention to the people around him. He was not a man acquainted with hustle. In our Gospel story today, neither the desperate plea of Jairus to save his daughter nor the desperate crowd pressing in around Jesus seemed to hurry him. And perhaps it was precisely because Jesus was not rushing that he felt the brush of the bleeding woman's fingertips against the hem of his robe.

For twelve years this woman lived under the oppression of her bleeding, ailing body. We're not told why she was bleeding for so long, but we don't need to know the reason to imagine the hurt she was carrying: The constant discomfort. The shame at being unable to keep herself clean. And the despair at feeling abandoned – by her community and by God.

Twelve years is a long time to wait for a miracle. In the meantime, she bankrupted herself searching for a cure while her community shunned her. A menstruating woman was considered unclean; no one would risk touching her for fear of becoming unclean themselves. And so, for twelve years this woman was kept from breaking bread with her community, worshiping in the synagogue, and entering the temple. Perhaps she was denied marriage and a family. Perhaps her condition kept her confined to her home. A cure for this woman, then, meant more than an end to the incessant drip of blood between her legs. It meant an end to her shame, isolation, and loneliness. It meant regaining her place in the community and with it the security of knowing she belonged.

And so, when Jesus came to town, this woman seized on a desperate bid for healing. She'd heard that Jesus walked with God. When he laid his hands on people, miracles happened. But she was unclean, and Jesus was a holy man; he

wouldn't risk touching her. But maybe she could touch *him* – just a small touch, without him noticing.

The crowd around Jesus was thick – people pushing, shoving, reaching, trying to get his attention. And in the middle of that crowd was a synagogue leader, Jairus. He was distraught. He flung himself at the feet of Jesus, pleading with him to save his dying daughter.

Jairus was a well-respected and probably wealthy member of the community. In the social hierarchy of ancient Israel, he had a lot of power and privilege. The bleeding woman had none. Both were now on the ground at Jesus's feet. Social convention dictated that Jesus pay attention to Jairus and ignore the woman.

But Jesus did the exact opposite. He stopped what he was doing and gave the woman his attention. Her fingers brushed the hem of his cloak and Jesus felt healing power leave his body. He felt the nudge of the Holy Spirit, and he looked away from Jairus. "Who touched me?" The disciples were dismissive. There were a lot of people touching Jesus, after all. They needed to get going; Jairus's daughter was dying. But Jesus was undeterred. "Who touched me?"

When the woman revealed herself, trembling, Jesus offered her the deepest hospitality: He acknowledged her like a family member. "Daughter," he called her, "your faith has made you well; go in peace" (v. 48 CEB). Jesus rewarded the woman's faith by humanizing her. He not only healed her, but he gave her a new identity. No longer was she the unnamed, bleeding woman. Instead, Jesus called her 'Daughter.' He elevated her from social outcast to child of God right there in front of her entire community.

Jesus demonstrated that there is tremendous power in just taking the time to stop and notice. Noticing a person, acknowledging them, has the power to remind someone that they are loved and seen by no other than their Father in heaven. Noticing a person has the power to impart the gifts of community and belonging. Noticing a person even has the power to heal.

Now, when I teach this story, someone will ask, "But what about Jairus?" While Jesus was attending to the bleeding woman, Jairus learned that his daughter had died. Some argue that Jesus's decision to stop cost the little girl her life.

There is indeed a hierarchy of notice in this story, just like there is in our world. The world notices people like Jairus first – people with wealth, power, privilege. Jesus inverts that hierarchy. Jesus gives his attention first to the people the world shoves to the side. But that doesn't mean Jesus doesn't care about people like Jairus. God's compassion is infinite and inexhaustible. Jesus takes the time to heal the bleeding woman, and then he carries on to Jairus's home and raises his daughter from the dead. In the end, Jesus disrupts the power of death itself, and the good news of her resurrection foreshadows the good news of his own.

Biblical hospitality should be disruptive. It should disrupt our routines. It should disrupt our comfort. It should disrupt our preferences. It should disrupt our assumptions. Not for disruption's sake, but for the sake of sharing the Good News of God's radical love and welcome for all people.

The biblical hospitality Jesus modeled asks us to give others an unhurried moment. To do so we must press pause on whatever we are doing and give that other person our complete attention and focus. Every day as we move through our lives we encounter people in need of welcome and belonging. Every day we have an opportunity to show the hospitality of Christ.

Do we notice people? Are we open to what God might do for them through us? The presence of other people around us is such a normal part of life that we can easily become oblivious. This is especially true in a group environment like our congregation, where we will naturally gravitate toward people we already know. We must work hard at looking for and paying attention to new faces. We must exercise and build up the muscle of noticing.

Here is a good place to start. These are called the 3-minute rule and the 10-foot rule.

- The 3-minute rule: Spend three minutes before and after worship greeting someone you do not know instead of only visiting with those you do. While we are not a big church, we are large enough that not everyone knows each other. Maybe you have seen someone sitting across the sanctuary from you for years, but you still don't know their name. [the center of the sanctuary like crossing the Red Sea] Introduce yourself. Make a new connection this week! Say hello to guests, but also say hello to each other.

- The 10-foot rule: You are responsible for the environment ten feet around you. Greet and introduce yourself to those within ten feet of you. (This also applies to facility needs: If you notice something that needs to be done within ten feet of you (cleaning up a spill, straightening up chairs, restocking supplies), go ahead and take care of that thing. It makes for a more welcoming space for everyone.)

You can also apply these rules when you are out and about in the community, not just here at church. What I love about these rules is that they are simple and doable. God's attention is limitless; mine is not. But I *can* be responsible for being hospitable in my small sphere of influence. And when we all do our part to extend welcome, we build the kind of community we are longing for. Remember that the word "community" shares a root with the words "common" and "compassion." That root is the prefix "com" which means *with*. We share the common work of hospitality *with* each other so that we can build communities of compassion where people are welcomed into the embrace of Christ.

This common work requires some sacrifice. We may have to sacrifice our plans for the day so we can stop and listen and pray with someone who is struggling. We may have to set aside some of our preferences to make room for new people and generations. We may have to step away from the comfort of our social circle to help a stranger or guest feel welcome. We make these sacrifices together as a witness to the God who loves and seeks after us, the God who is near to us and wants to be in relationship with us, the God who saves and heals us, the God who shows us endless hospitality through His son, Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: *Jesus, you noticed people. You heard the cry of the blind man, you noticed the woman who touched the hem of your robe, you noticed children. Help us see people as you see them. Help us be curious about others around us. Help us not become so distracted by our to-do list or so busy or so self-absorbed that we don't see others around us. Lord, we lay aside our own desires, needs, and wants so that we might be used by you in ministry in our community and in the world. Help us find ways to be your hands and feet, to begin practicing hospitality in all aspects of our lives so that it flows naturally in all that we do, bearing witness to our love for you. Amen.*²

² Adapted from a prayer by Debi Nixon in *The Art of Hospitality Companion Book: A Practical Guide for a Ministry of Radical Welcome* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2024), 60.