



lutheran
metropolitan
ministry

listening. serving. empowering.

Jesus has this most stubborn tendency to make us rather uncomfortable with how much he insists on helping others we would prefer to avoid altogether. *We* have this most stubborn tendency to deep-down wish those on the margins would be left to make their own community, so that we do not have to: that they should fend for themselves, and we, of course, trust that God will go over there and take care of it in the form of an insistent loving and compassionate Jesus Christ. And yet, our Lord continues to call us to be in community with those on the margins, as if we are, in fact, supposed to be one community, one family in Christ, no matter whatever differences we humans obsess over in this life. And time and time again, even without our collective permission, the church has responded to the needs of those we consider to be on the margins of our communities we call home, as if they deserve the same Resurrection power of ministry as we ourselves experience.

It's quite possible that the best local example is none other than a ministry we proudly support as ELCA congregations in northeastern Ohio, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry. Just over a month ago they celebrated their annual Founder's Day in memory of their beloved Pastor Richard Sering, who back in the 1960's, helped initiate a local movement that not only helps those like the man in the story, but also empowers such people to bring their own transformational ministry to life; their own powerful version of the end of this story: "go and tell what mercy has been shown to you."

One of the services LMM provides is a men's shelter that is the largest in the entire state of Ohio. I've only been there a few times: once to help serve lunch. I wasn't so blown away by the other volunteers behind the counter; instead, I couldn't help but be taken aback by the men who were taking the lead on the other side: men, who, at one point in their own life hit absolute rock bottom and made the trek up Lakeside Avenue desperately seeking help, hoping for any kind community that would care at all about them. They found it because of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry.

But the true power of their own transformational story does not come full circle until you see those same men standing at the front of the room and making sure everyone gets something to eat, checking in on the residents to see how they're doing, making sure they make it to whatever job interview or whatever appointment so that they are cared for; as if everyone in that building, no matter the marginal circumstance, is worth the most basic human respect, compassion, and love.

The captivating inspiration of such ministry is to witness the people who were once helped by others, oftentimes turn out to be the ones who are more than willing to go to whatever distant margin of physical, emotional, or spiritual havoc, and reveal the same mercy that was extended by Christ himself in this story.

Some of us will never be on such margins of this world, the places and people often overlooked by the rest. But there still will be times when we feel separate from others for whatever the reason, and we can only hope that we are part of any kind of community that will never allow us to go through such a time alone. Such fending for ourselves is not the community Christ envisioned for our humanity. No, he stubbornly insists that we are all worth the same love, the same compassion, the same cross to instill the Gospel for the whole world: that nothing that happens in this life, can ever separate us from God's margin-defying love in Jesus Christ, our Lord. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.