

With my right arm out of commission due to rotator cuff surgery, the use of voice-to-text has been essential. It has also been a bit comical. I realize that things were going to be different as I created the first bulletin. “Postlude” was translated “post lewd”! I understand that voice recognition may not be schooled in liturgy, but who knew that it would be a window into its diametric opposite. In the writing of this piece, “altar” was translated “ulcer”! And another humorous misspelling was with the phrase that I often use, “many thanks.” One of you knows very well that sometimes the translation would be, “no thanks”! And my favorite: the word “messy” translated “Messi” (Now that is voice-to-text with priorities)! Nevertheless, my English teacher from high school would be proud. Hearing me bark out sentences that include punctuation commands as the sentence is in process would make her beam. Blah blah blah comma blah blah blah period. Blah blah blah blah comma blah blah blah period!

The situation has forced me into an acute awareness of inability and need. My inability. My need. My inability to be able to do even mundane tasks like tie my shoes. Thus, the need of others. It's a good Lenten discipline. The situation mirrored to a degree themes that Sara Miles made in the most recent Wednesday night video, *Bread and Wine*. Miles runs the food pantry that provides food in the middle of the sanctuary of Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. She makes a wonderful connection between the meal that is shared around the altar on Sundays and the food that is given away on Fridays. Everyone is welcome to the meal on Sundays. Everyone. And everyone is welcome to the pantry. Everyone.

However, Miles goes a step further. While everyone is welcome, everyone is also involved in serving. She notes that the work of the pantry is done *with* others not *for* others. Those who receive food also serve food. Thus, the pantry is not outreach. It is not a good deed. It is not a volunteer opportunity. Rather, the pantry is an extension of church. Indeed, it is church. Which is another image that Miles leaves with those who hear her. She says, “The food pantry is church: God making God’s self known.” The sacred is not bound to an hour on Sunday in a space that is kept separate and holy. The sacred is on the loose, afoot in the world, meeting us in each moment and in each place, whether we know it or not.

At one point in the video, the individual filming speaks to Miles off camera. He points out that the program that Miles oversees is messy and unsustainable. It isn't very efficient. Miles doesn't miss a beat. She responds that one of the most idolatrous words is efficiency. “God,” she says, “isn't efficient. God is merciful.” And what a powerful witness that is. We live in a world that is fascinated by greater and greater efficiency. We ooh and aah over gadgets that can make less work, more productivity, greater outputs and outcomes. Yet, if we become too enamored of efficiencies, we lose sight of the very reality of life: it is messy and at times unsustainable. We need each other. If God is not merciful, then we, are of all people, most to be pitied.

This time of healing has certainly offered a perspective on life that, while not initially desired, is very important. Inability and need are a part of our makeup. Maybe not always. Maybe not in ways that are readily apparent. Yet certainly at some point and certainly in ways that will ultimately impact us. To see the world through that lens opens you up a bit more to compassion, patience, and understanding. The lens that Miles offers is also a critical one. The church is not just a building and a service in time. It is everywhere. And the rule that God uses for attending to those who attend-- whether it is a service or a pantry or job or meal or family outing or concert or a walk or whatever else--the rule God uses is mercy. And thank God for that!