

Mary of Magdala  
Ecumenical Catholic Community  
301 E. Stuart St. - Fort Collins, CO 80526



**Homily - June 28, 2020 – Deacon Rosean Amaral**

2 Kings 4:8-37

Elisha raises the Shunammite's Son

Before I begin my homily, I would like to express my deepest thanks to this community of Mary of Magdala for the Social Justice work that we have been involved in since our inception. From the family housing network formerly faith, family, hospitality, to the work that we have done with Isaac to hopefully ensure immigration justice, through the education we have offered through our adult education programs, and all of the wonderful gifts and donations that have been given by our social Justice committee to areas locally, nationally and internationally, such as Madonna Hospital in Nigeria and the peanut butter house in Africa to agencies in Fort Collins like Homeless Gear, FoCo Cafe, the Food Bank, Family Housing Network, One Spirit on Pineridge Reservation, and Annunciation House on our Mexican border. I would like to thank all of you who volunteer and have been involved in these works of God through your hands.

I was in the hospital when I heard the news of the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. I could not attend the protests or the marches of people crying out "Enough! We must end racism in our world! We must end police violence! We must love one another!"

I was very grateful to be able to attend Mary of Magdala's zoom meeting where community members were invited to give input to our public statement against racism both in our own faith community as well as our larger communities of Fort Collins and the world.

As the protests continued, as voices and experiences of people of color were heard, as donations were made, as book groups were formed, and as white people attended zoom meetings and seminars on white privilege, white supremacy, and anti-racism, it became evident that we had all received a wake-up call that racism is alive and well in these United States and continues to be life-threatening to our sisters and brothers of color.

Yet, we might continue to distance ourselves from this knowing by saying, "Well, George Floyd's murder happened in Minneapolis, a big inner-city area, not here in Fort Collins. Except that, Loveland's newspaper, The Reporter Herald, ran a story on June 12, 2020, about a black CSU student and his co-worker, both employed by a local roofing company, being held at

gunpoint face down on a sidewalk by a Loveland resident who "perceived" them to be a threat to his neighborhood. And then, on June 14, 2020, I heard the voices of some of our brothers and sisters of color who live here in Fort Collins sharing their personal experiences of racism at a Town Hall meeting that was co-hosted by World Wisdoms Project and the Fort Collins Interfaith Council.

So, it is from this place of heartache and humility that I deliver today's homily. It is from this place of injustice towards God's people of color, members with us of the body of Christ, that I hear the Shunammite woman crying out to us, "People of God, do not deceive your servant!"

She was barren, like Hannah before the birth of Samuel, or Saint Anne, before the birth of Mary, or Elizabeth before the birth of John the Baptist, except that this woman, the Shunammite, has never been freed from the stigma, the scorn, the shunning and 'outcasting' experienced by a woman who was not "favored by God", in fact whom God punished by not opening her womb. This mark of disgrace, the Shunammite woman has carried her entire life. To re-open such a wound would be devastating to her now since she and her husband are in their older years. So she protests when Elisha tells her she will bear a son. "Do not deceive your servant!" Do not tell me that my chains will be loosed if you cannot deliver.

I think of black people being loaded onto ships, chained in their sleeping quarters, undergoing such harsh conditions over the course of a voyage that took several months before they arrived in the States. Then they were sold into slavery to plantation owners, oftentimes having to further agonize the separation from their family members who were sold to different "masters." They were property, less than human, beaten, raped, and murdered at the whim of their "owners."

We all know this history.

Then, in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Although slavery was over for some 4 million slaves, the brutalities of white race prejudice persisted. The Southern states instituted laws known as Black Codes which allowed authorities to imprison blacks for something as slight as cursing in ear shot of a white person. Since slaves had been denied education and wages under slavery, once free, many were forced to rent land from their former white slave owners and remained in debt to them for decades. With no safety net or plan for integration into the larger society, the majority of freed slaves lived in desperate rural poverty. Freedom came with a new set of chains, and so the cry continued,

"People of God, do not deceive your servant!"

The Shunammite woman too, is temporarily released of her chains, only to have her son brought to her from the fields to die in her arms. Her bitter anguish, known only between herself and God, not her husband, not even Elisha, who laments, "The Lord hid it from me and

did not let me know," brings her to the feet of the Prophet crying out, "Did I not beg you not to deceive me?"

From the Emancipation Proclamation to the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments designed to ensure equality for emancipated slaves, to the decades long struggle by African Americans to end legalized racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, and racial segregation, culminating in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, our black brothers and sisters have called out to us, "Did I not beg you not to deceive me?"

Who are we, like Elisha, trying to send out to bring healing into this 400-year history of oppression, hatred, and violence? Who are we sending out?

The Shunammite woman answers this question for ELISHA as well as for us: "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live I will not release you." The work ahead is for us, each one of us, to do individually and we will not be released from this struggle to accompany our brothers and sisters of color pledging to revive our injured and maimed Body of Christ.

What do we intend to do to demand and foster anti-racist attitudes, policies, and systems in our world beginning in our homes, workplaces, schools, government, and churches?

We are God's holy men and women on Earth now. We are the ones that must act. How will we stand eye-to-eye, mouth-to-mouth, and hand-to-hand with our brothers and sisters of color, that we can all return to the wholeness that is promised us by the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Amen.