

For many years, St. Andrew's had another deacon whose name was Peggy Harris. I always credit Peggy with putting me on the road to becoming a deacon. Shortly after I retired from my paid job, she was a ring leader in persuading me to start a sewing ministry here at St. Andrews. We were partnered with LSSI who referred refugee women, most of whom were here with children, but no spouse.

Most of our students were from central African countries. One day there were three new students from Bhutan. I wasn't sure I knew where that was, much less that there was a reason for refugees from there, Peggy didn't know either. So I looked it up. These were Nepalis who had been driven from their country to Bhutan and had been there for nearly a hundred years. Because of a change of Bhutan government, the Nepalis were no longer welcome. To this day, I can hear Peggy, with great sadness, "There always has to be an 'other.'"

In today's Gospel, Jesus is pretty precise about "othering." First he calls a tax collector, an other, to follow him. Then sits down to eat with not only tax collectors, but sinners of many kinds. Can't you just hear the religious authorities saying to his disciples, "Tax collectors...of all people! Why is a great teacher like him eating with tax collectors and other sinners?" There's Peggy's word again....OTHERS! But Jesus responds, "I came to call sinners, not the righteous."

He also encounters a woman who has been "suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years." Let's be clear, in Biblical times, the simple fact that she was a woman made her an Other. PLUS, during any woman's monthly cycle and after the birth of a child, she was considered "impure," and untouchable for a specified amount of time. So this poor person was *really* an outsider, an Other. She had

come to believe that in spite of her impurity, she would be healed if she simply touched the hem of Jesus' robe. Jesus didn't see her otherness, he saw her faith.

We also heard about a leader of the synagogue, who comes to Jesus, kneels down, and begs, "Save my dying child." At first glance, this father may not seem othered, but I strongly suspect that as a religious leader, by turning to Jesus for help, he "others" himself. Again, even though many people had begun mourning her, Jesus restored the man's daughter to life.

When it comes to Others, we are called to emulate Jesus. It is an on-going struggle. It's probably been 15 years since Peggy and I discussed those Bhutani "others." Somehow, there continue to be refugees. Most of them need a new home because they have been "othered" and fear for their lives. Many countries, including our own, try to welcome them. Yet, we hear daily controversy, critical of undocumented immigrants.

More than 20 years have passed since St. Andrew's deliberately opened our doors, making it clear that we didn't just tolerate the presence of this group of "othered" folks, (no matter who you love, where you've been, or what you've done); we have welcomed them to be part of us. And yet today, our voices, even combined with those of many churches and denominations, were unable to stop some very discriminatory, "othering" legislation in our state this past year.

It's easy to feel frustrated and overwhelmed when such roadblocks appear. We cannot, as one congregation, one diocese, even one national church put an end to the othering of all refugees and LGBTQTIA+ persons. Even when we're really focused on one ministry, another likely intrudes. Isn't that what happened to Jesus?

He was focused on a dying child and hurrying to revive her when a woman, who shouldn't even be out in public, reached out to touch his clothing. Did he push her away because he had to get to the child? No, he stopped to deal with the suffering person in front of him, allowing the woman to be healed and encouraging her, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well."

Even though the tasks seem enormous, so are the rewards. St. Andrew's is blessed and encouraged by those who we welcome. Those of us who participated in the ESL classes we offered before the pandemic, had wonderful relationships with our students. Well, not really students, friends.

This weekend St. Andrews is participating in Pride Fest. Many of us are leaving right after the service to walk in the parade. While our involvement requires a lot of time and work, those who participate get a unique opportunity, not only to tell the world we welcome Others, but to socialize with our fellow parishioners and deepen friendships.

So let us keep answering the call to emulate Jesus, ministering to Others. Knowing that sometimes, we will have our focus interrupted, and we will be redirected to deal with a ministry that is right in front of us, just as Jesus did. Remember Jesus didn't just heal illness, he offered encouragement. Let us also encourage each other as we continue to minister to the "others," remembering that each of us is "the other," too!