



GOD SAYS YES TO ME

I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic
and she said yes
I asked her if it was okay to be short
and she said it sure is
I asked her if I could wear nail polish
or not wear nail polish
and she said honey
she calls me that sometimes
she said you can do just exactly
what you want to
Thanks God I said
And is it even okay if I don't paragraph
my letters
Sweetcakes God said
who knows where she picked that up
what I'm telling you is
Yes Yes Yes

BY KAYLIN HAUGHT





GIVING ALMS, EMPOWERMENT, SOLIDARITY

By Anne Housholder

A friend, who is in long-term recovery from alcohol addiction, recently posted this fable:

An addict fell in a hole and couldn't get out. A businessman went by. The addict called out for help. The businessman threw him some money and told him to buy a ladder. But the addict could not find a ladder in his hole. A renowned psychiatrist rode by and heard the addict's cries for help. He stopped and said, "How did you get in there? Did your parents put you there?" The addict thanked him but was still in his hole. A priest came by and heard the addict calling for help. The priest gave him a Bible and said, "I'll pray for you." The priest prayed for the addict, then left. The addict was grateful and he read the Bible, but he was still stuck in that hole. A recovering addict happened to be passing by. The addict cried out, "Hey, help me, I'm stuck in this hole." Right away, the recovering addict jumped in the hole with him. The addict said, "What are you doing? Now we're both stuck here." But the recovering addict said, "It's okay, I've been here before, I know the way out."

I've been thinking about this fable in relation to the issues surrounding poverty that have been heavy on the minds of the Lydia's House community this season. Within our house, we have expanded the savings and loan-repayment goals that our guests set. At our worship services we are creating opportunities to give to other organizations with whom we partner. Within our Norwood community we have advocated against a restrictive anti-panhandling ordinance. In each of these situations with extreme poverty, we who have not experienced intergenerational or abject poverty are often left wondering, "What is the right response?"

We know the story of the Good Samaritan, who steps in and acts decisively to manage a stranger's medical care. He doesn't stop to ask, "In what ways am I respecting or failing to respect the agency of this man? At which inn would he prefer to receive his medical care?" And for life-threatening medical care, decisive intervention can still respect the patient as person, but how far does the metaphor stretch? For other problems, like addiction as told in this fable, we see the wisdom of experience, the beauty of jumping down in the hole with the fellow addict, and the folly of thinking we know better what the right answers are going to be.

What then do we do with those in poverty? Is the only way to jump down in the hole? We know Jesus' answer to the rich young ruler, "Sell all your possessions, give to the poor and come follow me." This kind of unencumbered solidarity might make it easier for us to have hard conversations with women trying to create lives on vanishingly small near-minimum wage incomes or societal support. But, would we be more sympathetic? We might say, "We can live off \$12,000 a year, why can't you?" Additionally, our personal poverty would make it much harder to offer the stability or abundance that those traumatized by poverty need to heal. So, we are left still searching for ways out of the hole of poverty.

In the past few weeks, Meridith and I have been working on a savings and resource-building program for our guests. We provide saving tracking, incentivize routine savings and chores with tokens that are redeemable for diapers, bus passes and gift certificates. Guests' responses to the incentive program have been excellent. I would guess that greater than 80% of the available tokens per week are awarded, and it has made savings and chore checking much easier. We also incentivize guests to use resources like Smart Money at CityLink so that they benefit from the experience

of others who have successfully navigated to savings goals despite extreme poverty. We hope that offering resources through attainable goals will lead to the kind of abundance that respects personhood and agency.

Although I know I am not "jumping into the hole," I see my role in the savings and budgeting program as work of accompaniment. I come along side women overwhelmed by too many needs and not enough money. We have regular appointments every Monday so money management becomes a routine. We look at what best prioritizes their needs. We track their progress every week. We celebrate their successes. It does seem often like a long and arduous path to get out of a deep dark hole, but I do believe that we are walking with guests in slow, steady and consistent ways.

With our guests, we have the opportunity to be in deep conversations about what led them into homelessness and what can lead them out. We know we do not have all the resources or all the answers that they will need. For this reason, we are in relationship with many programs that are essential for our work of helping women transition to stable housing. Job training, furniture, childcare vouchers – it takes a lot to put a life back together after homelessness. At Lydia's House, we are practicing regular charitable giving by donating the offering from our monthly worship to organizations in our community that are providing help to those in need, including our guests. Organizations who've received an offering include 4-C, Women Helping Women, Safe Families, Zion Food Pantry, New Life Furniture, and Norwood Grows. No organization can help everyone or do everything, so we are grateful for the work that each of these organizations do and grateful to be able to give back to them.

However, we are also asking ourselves to be a witness for the homeless who aren't seeking stable on-going relationship – those who ask us for change or a bite to eat on the side of the road. Again, as Christians, we know the teaching – "Give to those who beg of you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them back" (Luke 6:30), yet we struggle to know what to do with this. I know myself to be inconsistent – I give when I feel like it, when it's convenient, when I have the right sized bill. When I'm in a period of deeper theological reflection, I am more likely to give a ride to a gas station, invite someone in for a meal, or take someone to a shop to get what they need. But, I can't say I have a theologically sound and unfailing principle of in the moment charitable giving. When I walk with those who ask of me, I know that it is for a very short time and with little tangible change for either of us. Nevertheless, I know that the tradition of the church sees almsgiving as an important part of Christian witness. We will easily remember St Francis as a saint, a holy person who begged and began a movement of holy beggars and forget that he did this not just in solidarity with Christ but

HOW TO RESPOND
WELL TO POVERTY AND
HOW TO UNDERSTAND
ALMSGIVING RIGHTLY ARE
SOME OF THE MOST VEXING,
COMPLICATED AND
UNANSWERABLE PROBLEMS
WE FACE AS CHRISTIANS

was in solidarity with the kinds of disreputable beggars that we often fear enabling with our charity. However, we at Lydia's House do not want to give up on the idea of almsgiving in the most classic sense of the direct and uncomfortable position of being asked for help. Therefore, we believe that we are at least witnessing to the truth that Jesus did jump right down into the deep pit of chaotic homelessness throughout his ministry with the poor and those with the deepest physical and mental illnesses. Out of a call to stand with those who beg, several from our community spoke out against an anti-panhandling ordinance at the Norwood City Council in February. Although ultimately we were unsuccessful, we feel that we should speak up not just for the homeless women we serve in long-term relationship but also those who choose forms of help-seeking that can make us uncomfortable. It is a profound witness to the idea that we do not assume that we have all the answers to say, "Here are a few dollars; I didn't expect to give them; I don't have any expectations on how you use them."

How to respond well to poverty and how to understand almsgiving rightly are some of the most vexing, complicated and unanswerable problems we face as Christians. Jesus' ministry constantly offers us glimpses and facets of what a world would look like where the poor and the rich both receive what they need to live well together. The Bible gives no easy answers for living this out in our lives and communities. Our challenge is to pull together the pieces we can – to be in long term relationship with those we can, to support those who do work that needs doing, and to remember that those who panhandle are children of God. There is no one way to survive poverty, one magic formula to create financial stability where there is none, but there is the hope that in the midst of all these pits we will find Jesus among His beloved.



Lydia's House is always in need of high quality, light weight strollers for moms who ride the bus. Ideal features include an area to hold a shopping bag and easy fold up. If you have these to donate feel free to drop off at 2024 Mills Ave!



CELEBRATIONS & MILESTONES

AS ALWAYS, WE HAD MUCH TO CELEBRATE AT LYDIA'S HOUSE OVER THE WINTER AND EARLY SPRING SEASONS:



Teaira's graduation from home health training at Mercy Neighborhood Services and continued employment with Blackstone Home Health services



Rosalyn's completion of driving lessons and successful attainment of a driver's license



Rosalyn, Angelica and Christine's completion of stay at Lydia's House, and transition into independent housing, including receiving furniture from New Life Furniture



Advent observations and activities, including cookie decorating, homemade gift making with Kathy Kohl, and a hot chocolate bar



Christmas Eve and morning, complete with gifts from Bellarmine Chapel's giving tree, karaoke and a special breakfast and homemade stockings, courtesy of Anne Housholder and Stephanie Howes



Many special holiday outings, including but not limited to a Zoo Festival of Lights Trip and a trip to the Children's Museum



The International Women's Day celebration at Xavier University reuniting the Lydia's House community with the former Xavier interns



Ground Hogs Day intention setting and game night, which included around the house fitness goals, Mary Ellen's intention to walk again, and Annie Eilerman's intention to get the "green swimming band" at the YMCA pool. (Special thanks to Anne for her sculpting of a gum paste ground hog which sat atop a pile of chocolate mousse and gummy worms)



Mary Ellen's receiving of the Madges Alumni award from the Xavier University Theology Department, for her role in founding Lydia's House

BIRTHDAYS



Angelica's 25th, Anne's 36th, Stephanie's 26th

NEW ADDITIONS



Laura Bigelow, regular volunteer, welcomed Eleanor Ruth on January 19; Taffany Duggins, weekly meal angel, welcomed grandson Kayden Nasir McBeth (pictured above left) on April 12; The Mitchell-Eilerman crew welcomed Jacob Walker Eilerman (pictured above right with Sam and Annie) on April 16. We eagerly await the births of baby boy Stoxen, son of board member Jill Stoxen, and baby boy Lute, son of our newest guest Kayla — both are expected any day!

Live and Work With Us!

Lydia's House is currently seeking year-long Associate Volunteers to live in a communal setting and work alongside core community members and guests. The term of service is a minimum of one year, and applications are accepted on a rolling basis. A small monthly stipend is available. We ask that all applicants for the Associates Program be at least 23 years of age and possess a willingness to be challenged and grow. We are seeking people of faith who desire to embrace life in a Christian community and commit to regular prayer and service. Volunteers should be passionate about living alongside the poor and living simply. For more information, visit our website at www.stlydiashouse.org or contact Mary Ellen at maryellen@stlydiashouse.org.





JESUS, THE PARALYTIC AND ME

LUKE 5:17-26 COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE (CEB)
JESUS HEALS A PARALYZED MAN

Our co-founder Mary Ellen fell in January and broke her ankle and leg. What followed was surgery and a recovery that's she's still in the process of, coinciding with her third trimester of pregnancy and the birth of her son. Below is her reflection on her injury in light of the story of the paralytic in the book of Luke, as she presented it at our February worship service.

17 One day when Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and legal experts were sitting nearby. They had come from every village in Galilee and Judea, and from Jerusalem. Now the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal. 18 Some men were bringing a man who was paralyzed, lying on a cot. They wanted to carry him in and place him before Jesus, 19 but they couldn't reach him because of the crowd. So they took him up on the roof and lowered him—cot and all—through the roof tiles into the crowded room in front of Jesus. 20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

21 The legal experts and Pharisees began to mutter among themselves, "Who is this who insults God? Only God can forgive sins!"

22 Jesus recognized what they were discussing and responded, "Why do you fill your minds with these questions? 23 Which is easier—to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24 But so that you will know that the Human One[a] has authority on the earth to forgive sins" —Jesus now spoke to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, get up, take your cot, and go home." 25 Right away, the man stood before them, picked up his cot, and went home, praising God.

26 All the people were beside themselves with wonder. Filled with awe, they glorified God, saying, "We've seen unimaginable things today."

I ask us to reflect on our deepest darkest moments of brokenness; our hardest and most hopeless times. I imagine that it was this kind of desperation that led this man to agree to these roof lowering shenanigans.

This week alone we at Lydia's House encountered the paralytic in many forms: a former guest who has lost the ability to walk due to health problems and can't care for her beloved baby; an intake call from a woman addicted to heroin who has burned bridges with the Drop Inn Center and the CCAT house, leaving her literally with nowhere to go; a mother caring for her wheelchair bound 9 year old daughter, who can't be accommodated by any of the shelters because none of us are handicapped accessible. Lydia's House is often the location where the paralyzed come, and it is through our door (thankfully not our roof) that women arrive as a last hope. Group living may seem odd to many who call; intentional community suspect; but honestly, as the mother of the wheel chair bound daughter told me, "whatever you have has to be better than this extended stay motel."

Of course, this Bible story has been with me this winter season



not because it has such profound parallels to many who have lived or sought to live here; but for obvious reasons. On January 4, I slipped on a small package left on my porch and broke my leg and ankle. I felt the worst pain I've ever felt, and what's followed has been surgery with limited anesthesia, the installation of a plate and screws in my leg, and the inability to walk, drive or care for my two children. Not quite bed ridden, I still have felt kin to this paralyzed man.

However, as intriguing as the paralysis is I'd argue this Bible story isn't so much about the man's inability to walk as it is about the faithfulness of his friends and his encounter with Jesus; of both the forgiveness of his sins and the healing of his body.

When we talked about this passage at our staff meeting a couple of weeks ago everyone was struck by the fact that the first healing of this man is not of his legs, but rather Jesus saying "Friend, your sins are forgiven." While it is a bit jarring, my seven weeks of bedrest have left me to ponder the question at the heart of this first healing: "Is it better to be able to walk or know that you're ok even if you never walk again?" While my first impulse is to answer "to walk" I'm left with the reality that none of us are guaranteed outward wholeness. Is God only the God of the walking or of the paralyzed too? Is God only God if all of us can walk? This problem gets at one of the most basic questions about God—Is God real even in the midst of deep individual suffering? And in answer to that, I think Jesus offers forgiveness of sins first to say, "I am God and you are ok, even on that cot. You are ok right now. You paralyzed man are whole right now."

From what I know about disability in biblical times, I imagine this paralyzed man's life has been a series of messages telling him that he's not ok, and that his condition is his fault. It's likely that many around him have told him his sins got him into this awful place. And maybe they did. We don't know why he's paralyzed but perhaps he got drunk one day and hit his head or his spine, and that was the end of life as he once knew it. But perhaps he was just born that way. Or perhaps he slipped on a poorly placed package.

Regardless of why he's on that cot, the outcome is the same: someone must wait on him for his every need, he can't go to the toilet alone, if his family is dependent on farming as many were in that time, not only can he not do his part, but he's another mouth to feed. And in a world of scarcity, it has to be hard to not lay on that cot all day and think "If only I could walk all would be good."

As I look back to our life at Lydia's house I think about the emphasis we put on goals and moving forward. We ask everyone here to be walking toward something, even six-year-old Annie has a goal she's working on. But for most guests these goals are defined by employment, savings and housing—a golden triangle that we view as the keys to independence. We focus on these because most women living with us have lost everything and we want to help them get back on their feet. But we must be cautious not to align ourselves with the predominant messages of the world, which tells those who've lost everything two main things:

- You have sinned and that's why you don't have what you need
 - All your problems will be solved once you pick up your cot and walk home
- That is not the message of this passage. Jesus says instead:
- I'm not gonna judge you for why you're paralyzed. Actually we're not getting into that.
 - Whether or not you pick up that cot, you are beloved; frankly you're ok.

Jesus' message is the exact opposite of rugged independence. In fact, even the paralyzed man's healing is a group experience. The passage reads "When he saw their faith, he said 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'" This healing paints a picture of dependence on God and dependence on reliable and faithful others.

Two years into Lydia's House, I would say those of us in leadership here have seen the deep truth revealed in this first healing



miracle. A person might achieve every goal they set, leave with a job and an apartment and even a car, but if they don't believe that they are ok and if they don't have a support system that really cares for them, it's unlikely they'll be able to stay upright.

My own experience of being without the use of my leg has only reiterated this lesson. In the first week after my surgery I counted 24 people in and out of my house—mostly friends from Church or Lydia's House: my community. They helped me to the bathroom, cleaned up vomit induced from pain meds, helped me bathe, cared for Annie and Sam, did grocery shopping and brought so much food we had to start turning it away. My credentials, education, and even the variety of insurance policies we're careful to keep up meant little in this time. I've stayed sane not primarily even because of the promise that I will walk again; this time has been hinged on a deep belief that I am loved, and the sacrificial manifestation of that by my friends and family.

All that said, though, I do want to walk again. And I have no doubt that when that paralyzed man was lowered through the roof he came down hoping not so much for sins forgiven but that this awful curse would be broken. And while I know that what the guests of Lydia's House need most and what we all need most is the deep internal belief that we are good and loved, I'm also under no illusion that inward wholeness would be enough: each guest here has come seeking a better outward life, her own place, living wage jobs and the list goes on. So I'm not surprised that this passage ends as it does. Jesus understands what's at stake in these early days of his ministry, and that this man likely came to no longer be paralyzed. And while Jesus is absolutely right to question, "Which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven or to say get up and walk?" (the answer, by the way, as we've lived this is that walking is easier) he does grant this man his wish. And the passage ends with the man standing up, picking up his cot, and going home rejoicing God.

The last line of this passage gives us some insight into how hard it is to change everything. In what appears to be a matter of minutes, Jesus has offered this man both emotional and physical healing. And we read that the crowd is "filled with awe" and says "we've seen unimaginable things today." That's because they did. What we know from this Lydia's House journey and what I know from my own broken leg and ankle is that to go from paralyzed to walking; from broken to whole; from friendless to friended; from lacking to abundance....well it takes a while and typically is a lot of work.

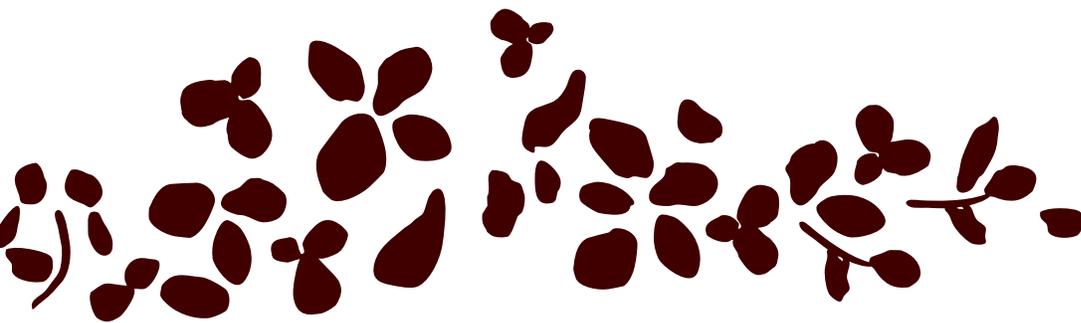
And so to conclude, the words of encouragement I can offer are these:

- Gather the kinds of friends around you that would take you up to a roof, remove the tile, and lower you down, because you never know when you'll need them; if you're able to be, be that kind of friend to someone else.
- Seek first the wholeness that can never be taken from you; the belief that your sins are forgiven and that you are ok.
- Hold lightly to the things that can quickly pass: your health, your working ankles, even your home and your stuff. No matter how good you are, you've got no guarantee of these things.
- But when you do have them, when the things you need are there, when you're able to pay your bills or lift your children, when you're physically able and emotionally stable, go home praising God. This is no small feat.

LYDIA'S HOUSE
PO Box 128808
Cincinnati, OH 45212

STLYDIASHOUSE.ORG
513-549-7752

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Cincinnati, Ohio
Permit No. 6207



LYDIA'S HOUSE

CALENDAR

May 8, 2016, 8pm: Join us for a special catered dinner and Mother's Day service, celebrating the mothers in our community. If you're a mother and can come we'd love to acknowledge you too! RSVP to Stephanie@stlydiashouse.org

May 13-15: Catholic Worker and Intentional Christian Communities Gathering. Several folks from our community will be going to spend some quality time with other like minded Christians from Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana. If you're interested in attending email the organizer at the Bloomington Catholic Worker: rosmartinoceller@gmail.com

June 26, July 24, August 21, 5pm: Summer Monthly Worship. Join the core community, guests, and associates of Lydia's House as we celebrate simple worship services in our backyard with music, shared prayer, an offering and readings. Children are welcome and included! Potluck supper to follow; bring a dish to share. In case of rain, these events will be in the living room.

July 7-10: Wild Goose Festival. Join several members of the Lydia's House community in Hot Springs, NC as we camp, listen, and learn with other progressive Christians. Wildgoosefestival.org

September 17, 6pm: Women for Women dinner, fundraiser and concert. Celebrate with us as we unite with women across the city to remember the good work of the last year at Lydia's House and raise funds for our general operations at the home of Maria Krzeski. RSVP to maryellen@stlydiashouse.org

October 23, 5pm: All Saints Worship Service and Teach-In. Join us as we celebrate the saints that our rooms are named for and remember their witness of faith. Kid-friendly prayer service and teaching in the living room followed by soup and bread. RSVP to maryellen@stlydiashouse.org if you plan to stay for dinner.

