

Life in the House of Mercy, by D. Brendan Johnson

art selection and comment by [Lil Copan](#) in the [May 4, 2022](#) issue



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Brendan Johnson, a medical student, podcast host, and graduate of the theology, medicine, and culture fellowship at Duke Divinity School, brings the ordinary materials of his woodcuts—ink, wood, chisels—in conversation with the wondrous acts of healing they depict. His work focuses on ethics and just care. “Our suffering patients confront us, point blank, with the ways in which we all fail to love one another well,” Johnson writes in an article for the Hastings Center.

His artwork, like his advocacy for patients, is a working out of that loving each other well. Both vocations call on a sacramental imagination. In this woodcut we witness a starkly meaningful meeting: between the resurrected Christ in service, attention, and love and a vulnerable patient. We see equipment transformed, flowering around the pole/cross, as the healing presence bows in service to the one in need, each of them sacred to the other and sacred in the encounter. A clock marks time above them, an element of the now and of Christ’s presence in it. We see both timelessness and time. We see Johnson’s call to medical ethics, to larger questions of the posture of care. “We are called,” he writes, “to be deeply present, and as useful as possible, to those who are suffering.”