



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST JUNE 30, 2024

WISDOM OF SOLOMON 1:13-15,2:23-24; PSALM 30; 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15; MARK 5:21-43

RISKING HOPE

Mark 5:21-43 [*When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.]*

Good morning! It is wonderful, if slightly surreal, to be back here today with all of you. I would like to thank all of you who have been so supportive of me during my journey in seminary. I would especially like to thank the Dean for inviting me to preach today and

thank him and the Vestry for their continual support.

Our Gospel reading today focuses on two stories of healing.

Jesus and his disciples have just disembarked from a boat, when Jairus, one of the leaders of

the local synagogue, approaches him, begging to come quickly, and heal his little daughter, who is near death.

And so, they set off for Jairus's house, and are immediately — for everything happens quickly in the Gospel of Mark — interrupted by this second person in need of healing. And, like Jairus, her situation is indeed desperate.

For the past twelve years, this woman has experienced ongoing, chronic hemorrhages. She has gone to healer after healer and doctor after doctor, but her condition has only grown worse. Whatever funds she has are now gone. She is, presumably, teetering on the edge of poverty, if not actually there.

But, even more, her condition means that, according to the purity codes of her time, which are recorded in Leviticus 15; she is viewed as ritually and ceremonially unclean. She cannot participate fully in the life of her community. Anyone she touches or who touches her will also be made unclean. She may even be required to quarantine.

Remember the isolation that many, if not all, of us underwent during the Covid-19 pandemic four years ago? Imagine undergoing that for twelve years, with no vaccines or no end in sight.

For her, the faithful Jewish response to illness would have been to go to the Temple and pray for healing, but that option is closed to her, given her condition. She is even barred from the Court of Women.

And, worst of all, in her social and religious context, this chronic, painful, debilitating illness might have been viewed — probably was

viewed — as punishment for her sin. Think about the man born blind that we hear about in the Gospel of John. Jesus's own disciples ask him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

In our world today, this attitude may have eased somewhat. But not always. When I was serving as a chaplain at the Auburn Medical Center a few years ago, I heard story after story: of isolation, of loneliness, of judgment from people who suffered from addiction, mental illness, and progressive or chronic conditions. And today, on this Pride Sunday, I also would be remiss if I didn't mention the horrific way that people who suffered from HIV/AIDs were treated, especially in the early years of that pandemic. They experienced shunning, exclusion, or were even refused treatment. Eventually, it did get better, but that doesn't negate the suffering they went through.

This hemorrhaging woman's circumstances are indeed desperate. She is excluded. Impoverished. And it is implied in the reading that she is forced to advocate for herself, because, unlike Jairus and his daughter, she has no one else to do it for her.

Her situation is indeed dire. But she hasn't quite lost everything. Not quite.

She still has hope.

And when she hears of this Jesus, this amazing healer, she wonders if he can help her, too. And so, she develops a plan.

She doesn't want to approach him openly.

Maybe she's afraid he will reject her.

Or that her neighbors or nearby bystanders will recognize her, and intervene, ordering her away, to protect Jesus's purity.

After all, she is unclean, and if he touches her, he will become unclean, too.

Given that, her plan is really quite audacious. She will quietly approach Jesus while he is surrounded by people, by the crowds that have started following him everywhere, and just quietly reach out and touch the hem of his cloak.

That will be enough to heal her, she believes.

She will be whole again. And no one will need to know.

But, given her cultural norms, touching a man that she is not related to, especially given her health condition, is highly risky behavior.

She risks losing whatever support she still has.

But, for her, it's worth it.

And it works. She is healed. But it also doesn't go exactly as she planned.

Because Jesus notices. Something feels different. He stops walking, scans the crowd, and demands to know who touched him.

And now, in this moment, the woman is presented with yet another risky and immediate choice.

She can follow her original course of action, quietly melt away into the crowd, as she planned. No one would know it was her. Or she can take yet another risk. And that is what she chooses to do.

She comes forward, kneels at Jesus's feet, awash in terror, and tells him everything.

And what does Jesus do? How does he respond? He calls her "daughter."

After all of that time in loneliness and isolation, separated from friends and family. He calls her daughter. He tells her that her faith has made her well. And bids her to go in peace.

Can you imagine what that moment must have been like for her?

She is healed. She has her life back. She can return to her community.

But, even more, her faith has been noticed, rewarded, and publicly praised. She is an outcast no longer.

But what about poor Jairus?

All of this time, he has been waiting.

All of this time, the precious seconds – possibly, the last seconds of his daughter's life – are ticking by.

And when they do finally get moving again, when they finally do get to his home, he is greeted with the worst news a parent can receive.

His daughter, his beloved daughter, is dead.

We never really are invited to see his point of view and we're not told how he felt. We only know how he reacted – and, also, how he didn't react.

He didn't get angry. He didn't reproach Jesus for wasting time. He didn't storm off. And when Jesus told him to have faith, he didn't scoff. If you think about it, this is really quite extraordinary.

Now, maybe it was just the shock, but, he, too, managed to hold on to a few, last shreds of

hope. And he, too, took a risk. Not as great a risk as the hemorrhaging woman did, but he risked looking foolish in front of his neighbors, or that they would laugh at him, as they laughed at Jesus. And he, too, was rewarded. His daughter was restored to life.

These are such wonderful stories.

Maybe some of you have stories like these, when you managed to hang onto hope or take a risk, even when your better judgment, modern-day purity codes, or your mocking neighbors suggested that it was futile or hopeless.

But then, there are also the other stories. The times when we have longed for healing, and it hasn't happened. Even though we have prayed and prayed and prayed.

And, at those times, some of the verses from Scripture that we heard today can be difficult to hear. Like, for instance, this line from today's Psalm.

"O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me."

Or this one, also from the Psalm: "You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy."

In the moments when healing has happened and we are rejoicing, these are lovely verses. But what if we are still in the midst of suffering? And it feels as if we are all alone, and that no one understands, let alone cares? And that, if God is trying to speak to us, somehow, we just can't hear it?

This is one reason why communities are so helpful and so central in our journey of faith.

Saint Teresa of Avila reminds us that Christ has no hands, feet, or body, but ours, the Body of Christ. And part of our shared ministry is to do as Jesus did, to go out into the world. To speak out about issues of injustice. This community does so beautifully, addressing such issues as racism, global climate change, and LGBTQIA+ rights, to name only a few.

Another part of our shared ministry involves supporting and ministering to one another, also, as Jesus did, as we each experience our own times of crisis, sorrow, or celebration. After all, what is a celebration without a community to rejoice with? And those of you who are involved in the ministries of hospitality and prayer in this place, like the Radix Group and Prayer Chain, among so many others, may have your own stories to share. How you came alongside and walked with someone else. Or how someone else came alongside you and walked with you.

The wonderful thing about our Christian journey is that it includes both. We are all called to do our part to bend the moral of the universe more towards justice. And we are all called to listen to, pray for, and sit with one another as we await God's healing grace. Whatever our calling and whatever our gifts, may we all be healed, all know ourselves as beloved, and all be empowered to share God's love with one other and this broken, hurting, world.

Amen.