

The Daughter
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
June 28, 2015
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Text: Mark 5:21-43

She has no name.

She has been unclean for twelve years now. She has no family to care for her. She has no physicians left with any answers or possible experimental treatments to try. She has no one to hold her on the days when the isolation of being unclean is too much. No one to offer even a word of hope that she might one day be included in circles of her religious community again. No hope of having children of her own. No one to call her beloved. She has no mother to rub her back when the cramps become unbearable and no sister to lay prayerful hands upon her cursed womb. She has no trappings of earthly success. She is no one, belonging to nobody, and she has nowhere else to go. She has nothing left to lose and everything to gain. A desperation. A drive. And now a decision. "Just one touch of his coat", she knew. She has no name. And then she sees him. The man who would claim her as Daughter.

He has a name.

His name is Jairus and he has everything. He has been the father to his daughter for twelve years now. He is a leader of influence in the Jewish Synagogue. He has a position of authority and a place of honor in his socio-economic and religious communities. As a man in this culture, he is on top of the world and even has the power to help or hurt people like our bleeding woman. He has a family; people who have covenanted with him and a daughter whom he loves dearly. He has had a family and community to care and pray for his daughter. Yet here he is. The man with everything has arrived at a desperation. A drive. And now a decision. The man he seeks out for healing is the same man his co-leaders label a blasphemer. "Just one touch of his hands and she could be healed." Jairus followed the man who would go on to instruct him "do not fear, only believe."

All of us are either the bleeding woman or Jairus. Some of us are both at differing times in our lives. We may be separated by resources, but we are united by desperation.

When I studied this text for today, I admit to being a bit overwhelmed. There are two powerful narratives here. Intertwining stories focused on not one, but two female subjects. A feminist's dream! There are deep themes to reflect on here – the meaning and role of faith; the juxtaposition between those who are powerful and those who are powerless; a call to reach out to those around us who are marginalized, especially those outside our circles of faith; an examination of just how God desires to miraculously heal those around us today. We could spend weeks questioning and studying this tour de force of a gospel passage; a single 15 minute sermon seems just as laughable as the mourners laughing at Jesus calling the little girl asleep instead of dead.

But as I listened to these stories and themes, I could not forget the bleeding woman who had no name. The bleeding woman who society called unclean, yet Jesus called Daughter. As I reflected on these stories, I thought about Jairus, the man who had everything except the means to heal his dying daughter. What does God's Spirit want to teach you and I today about this bleeding woman and the man with a dying child?

Brothers and Sisters, you all really rise to the occasion when the scriptures call you to action in our world. But today, I want to call you to faith.

One of the details I find most intriguing about our gospel passage today is the way faith takes shape in both stories. First with the bleeding woman, who acts with tremendous confidence, despite all that has happened to her. She has been unclean for twelve years. Being unclean means she is relegated to being on the very fringe of her society and if she even so much as brushes up against anyone, she will cause them to become unclean as well. But this brave woman, who is at the back of a crowd pressing upon Jesus, risks the uncleanness of this entire crowd, including Jesus, by pushing through all until she gets right by Jesus and touches his clothes. She does not fearfully approach Jesus. She trusts that He can heal here, with absolutely no effort on his part. It isn't until Jesus asks "who touched me?" where she realizes the totality of all that

has happened. Not only does she experience her physical ailment as being restored, but her eyes are opened to the full renewal that has enveloped her whole being. In fact, I am willing to bet that in this moment an epiphany has happened for the woman. It is the very act of making Jesus unclean that heals her. Jesus bears her uncleanness. It is this very act that saves her and restores her to full health. She thought she was taking something from Jesus, but actually he gave her something. This foreshadows the salvific act that Jesus would go on to do for every single one of us.

After this special moment, Jesus takes the opportunity to teach Jairus what it means to have faith.

A word about Jairus. Let's recognize that though he is in a position of privilege, he too possesses faith. Jairus understands acutely that while power, influence, and financial resources bring a measure of comfort, they cannot rescue a cherished little girl from the claws of death. Where the suffering woman had nothing to lose, Jairus had everything to lose. Faith is the knot that ties both of these vastly different people together. Jairus risks losing his job, his integrity, and his religious community by reaching out to Jesus; the man his fellow leaders would eventually put to death.

My favorite moment in this passage is right after the woman has just been healed; a moment witnessed by Jairus, who was walking with Jesus. Jairus's friends find him and say "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" Jesus, overhearing them, doesn't lament. He doesn't worry. He doesn't speak to the friends. He looks Jairus directly in the eye and speaks to that small well of faith from which Jairus had been drawing. "Do not fear, only believe."

And this, friends, is the word Jesus has for you too.

Do not fear, only believe.

I realize that many of you here are in the midst of challenges. And I also realize that some of these challenges will not end up with the results you desire, simply because you exercise more faith. Life is never that simple.

Sometimes we get the results we pray for, but sometimes we don't. But here is the good news. We learn in these stories that faith is not just the anticipation of the exact results. In both, there was a full submission of the entirety of life given to the care of Jesus. While we think we are giving Jesus a specific problem, He in turn takes on the trajectory of our entire life! Just like the exchange with the hemorrhaging woman! While the saving of lives in both stories is dramatic, the trajectory of each life that changed was even greater. The bleeding woman was not only granted physical healing, she was given a new community and identity as a daughter – a member of an actual family; a life that eluded her for 12 years. Our other daughter, Jairus', was part of a restorative answer for her family as well. They wanted intervention before she died; the idea that Jesus would raise her from the dead was far from what this family could imagine. Yet, this was the unanticipated journey they were to be a part of. Faith is a gift given of God, but is exercised and expressed through action and trust.

Jesus has taken on our entire life and we can trust God with the results. We are free to exercise faith in our relationship with God and each other. We need no longer fear, but only believe. As we let go of our fear, we are free to be vulnerable about where we need help. Are we sharing and praying with each other about our needs and challenges? Or have some of us declared ourselves unclean, going about our lives hidden and unknown? Are you desperate for healing? But are you relying solely on your own fortitude and resources, instead of sharing your burden with your brothers and sister in Christ?

Do not fear, only believe.

I have noticed that West Michigan has a unique problem, maybe you recognize it too. Christians here are some of the kindest, most generous, most compassionate people you will ever meet...as long as it is focused on someone else and not oneself. We take great joy in helping others, but take great shame in taking help for ourselves.

What our gospel passage demonstrates for us is the daring, audacious, faith-filled humility involved in becoming part of the miracle of asking for help. It doesn't matter if you have nothing or if you have everything.

The blessing of growth and community is only as good as how its members make themselves vulnerable with God and with each other.

Do not fear, only believe.

We go from outsider to daughter in our willingness to be honest and to admit we are weak.

As we cast off our fears by sharing a financial burden, a sister can offer a lead on a job. As we cast off our fears in sharing a burden of health, a brother can spend time and care for us. All these helpful actions require little of us, but become transforming, inclusive and caring to those around us. Those who have never been afforded the gift of helping, get to develop spiritual gifts, when we simply show our weaknesses. We, the church, become the garment of Christ to each other and to the world if we are willing to share and allow others share with us. With each act of sharing we demonstrate a move from fear into a testimony of belief.

Do not fear, only believe.