

2018.07.01 Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
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GOSPEL

Mark 5:21-43

The holy gospel according to Saint Mark, the fifth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²²Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³and 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.” ²⁴So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” ²⁹Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” ³¹And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’ ” ³²He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

³⁵While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” ³⁷He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” ⁴⁰And 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. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Today in Mark, we really are given two stories...one enfolded in another...

And while I studied the middle portion of the story...about the bleeding woman...extensively in seminary...lately, I find myself spending more time with surrounding story...of the community leader whose daughter is dying and who asks Jesus to come help. It's not that I like that story better. It's because we tell that part of story as part of chapel each year with our preschool students. And when we get close to the end of the year...when we remember together all the ways we have heard that Jesus showed people that he was powerful and that God loved them...the first two stories the preschoolers always remember are the one we heard last week...that Jesus was able to stop the storm...and the one we hear today...that he made the sick little girl well again.

Two women are healed today...two women whose names we do not know. Two unbearable pains are met by the power and presence of Jesus...the unbearable pain of an unrelenting, years-long, mysterious and shame-inducing illness. And the unbearable pain of the suffering of a child whose parent watches helplessly and fears losing her forever. I imagine that one of those two things...if not both...might grab our hearts today. And if not that...then we might think of the unbearable pain that sits with us in wakeful nights.

The woman who has been bleeding for twelve years gets a healing story like no one else...She reaches out to grab her own healing. She doesn't ask. She claims it. Somehow.

She reaches out to Jesus...to just his clothing...to whatever is in reach...and it is like Jesus is the passive conductor of healing electricity...She is the subject, and he is the object...and she does just exactly what she is able to do, which isn't much at this point...She has tried so much else...so many doctors for so many years. And in this moment, she reaches out for whatever she can brush with her fingertips....even if it's just the edge of the healing and holiness she hopes for...

And her bold faith shows us...that we have a God that chooses to be within our reach. Jesus chooses to be within her reach...However far your fingers extend...you can brush the edges of the clothing of the Word that opened its mouth and spoke stars and planets and subatomic particles. You can reach out your hand and hold the one who created life and yet choose to walk through death so death would die.

There is a phrase, after she is healed...and this is my translation...not the NRSV's...so you are free to take it with a grain of salt...but Mark says "she knew in her body" that she was healed. (The flock of scholars who translated the NRSV say "felt in her body" not "knew"...but I beg to differ). And then...after this happens, we hear that "Jesus knew in himself" (again...the NRSV says he was "aware that power had gone out from him" but not really...they each knew). They knew...in themselves...in their bodies...about each other...and about the power of God.

The kingdom is that close...that you feel it...in your muscles and your lungs and your guts and your bones...And God feels us that deeply, too. God chooses to be that close to us, and we are that close to God.

That is how close the kingdom is...and how powerful faith is to transform this world...this very world in which we live and feel and eat and walk and suffer and laugh and feel in our bodies what it is to struggle...and to reach as far as we can and still not be able to grab onto what we hope for.

But, then...in the most surprising ways...Jesus materializes under our fingertips...in our world...where we need him.

And Mark would not be satisfied if we didn't see ourselves as actors in this grand drama. He shows his audience that faith is the engine that drives the building of the kingdom of heaven. God is the architect...but we are builders.

The world is suffering unbearably. But God is close at hand. Mark is telling us to reach out...that even in the midst of this suffering, our fingertips can brush heaven. And it will change us. And we can change the world.

And God chooses the faith of a nameless woman...and the life of a helpless child to reveal the kingdom today. Not the rich, famous and powerful people. Not even the disciples who are important enough to have their names written down, at least. We know their names. Sure. But almost across the board...the ones whose names we know...are the ones who fail. Mark shows how the nameless ones who history won't remember will be co-workers in bringing the kingdom that is coming.

Will history remember us? Maybe not. But the kingdom of heaven belongs to the nameless and unimportant and mediocre and forgotten. It belongs to us...though I have to break it to you...it also belongs to a bunch of people we might not want to be associated with. And that's a part of the challenge. It belongs to the ones that we also forget and neglect.

Today, through the healing of these two women...Mark is telling us nothing less than this: "It is up to you." "I'm not doing this without you." The kingdom of heaven is coming to and through you. The religious authorities, and the ones placed in leadership positions are not to be relied upon to carry on the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ...not now...and not ever. Rather, the ones to whom God comes close...who Christ makes whole...will be the ones entrusted to bring to the world the good news of the wholeness of the royal rule of God.

That doesn't mean the world is going to think you are great or important. This work doesn't come with a lot of praise and power, by most standards. But...when you are part of it...you know it...in your body...you feel it...surging through your fingertips. And it's like you're touching the stars.

Thanks be to God. Amen.