

June 28 2015

## Scripture Lessons ~

### Mark 5: 21-45

#### **Sermon** *Faith When You Least Expect It*

I will start with a story. The pastor decided that a visual demonstration would add a lot of emphasis to his sermon one Sunday. So he placed four worms into four separate fruit jars. The first worm was put in a container of white wine; the second one was put into a container of cigar smoke; the third one was put in a container of Hersey Chocolate Syrup; the fourth one was put in a container of good clean soil. At the conclusion of his sermon, the minister reported the following results. The first worm in the white wine-what condition was he in? Dead. The second worm in the cigar smoke, is dead; the third one in the Hersey Chocolate Syrup-not happy-dead. The fourth one that was in the good clean soil was living and thriving in his fruit jar. The pastor asked the congregation, "What did you learn from his demonstration." Nobody said anything for a few minutes and then Mrs. Snyder who was the pillar of the church, sort of meekly raised her hand and said, "Pastor this is what I learned, as long as you drink white wine, smoke cigars, and eat chocolate, you are never going to have worms!"

This morning's gospel lesson from Mark's Gospel chapter five, speaks about the concerns between the relationships of healing and faith, too. But hopefully not in such crude a way as that pastor's object lesson did. As the passage begins Jesus and the disciples had been traveling back and forth across the Sea of Galilee, teaching and healing in various towns and cities along the shores of the lake. Upon docking after the most recent journey, Jesus and his followers are greeted by a man named Jairus, leader in the local Jewish community, whose daughter lay gravely ill. Jairus practically begs Jesus to come with him, and without any discussion and without any hesitation, Jesus, the disciples and a great crowd of people followed Jairus into their city. As everyone moved toward Jairus' house; the main action of the story shifts briefly into quite a different direction.

The great crowd presses onto Jesus on every side, but in the midst of the throng Jesus feels the light touch of someone's hand upon his garment. Immediately he stops and he asks what his disciples consider to be a foolish silly question. "Who touched my garment?" "Who touched my robe?" No doubt the disciples were extremely frustrated by the delay because they know how desperate the little girl's situation was. But in spite this attitude on their part, a shy middle-aged woman timidly came forward and told Jesus exactly what had happened. She had suffered from a severe bleeding condition for more than 12 years. And most importantly how she had touched the hem of Jesus' robe in faith and the bleeding which she had suffered for 12 years was suddenly healed.

I am sure that this poor woman had half expected Jesus to chew her out then and there and to send her on her way. Instead Jesus gently blesses her for her courage and the strength and quality of her faith in God. Now meanwhile, Jesus had barely finished speaking to that woman when the news came that the little daughter of Jairus, that Jesus had full well intended to heal, had died. At this point most of the crowd probably had turned to leave and Jairus and his family were devastated by the news. Jesus too could have walked away at this point but instead he encourages the little girl's family and friends with these famous words of faith, 'Do not fear, only believe'. "Do not fear. only believe." And grasping the child's hand Jesus quietly speaks these simple Arabic words, "Talitha cumi, which means little girl arise. And immediately the little girl got up and she walked.

This passage from Mark is so rich and so full of material in terms for discussion, but I think it is particularly helpful for each of us as we struggle to understand the relationship between faith and the healing touch of God in all facets of our lives.

First of all, I think this text without a doubt holds up for us the power in the importance of faith in each of our lives. I identify three types of faith that are represented in this passage. The first type of faith is what I call third party faith, which is evident in the love and courage of Jairus as he came boldly to Jesus asking for healing on behalf of his little daughter. I think this is also the kind of faith we can have as we come to God in prayer on the behalf of other people. For when we are an advocate for those who are weak or for those who are disadvantaged in our society, for people who cannot speak or defend for themselves.

The second type of faith that I call personal faith can be seen in the actions of the woman with the bleeding condition. She was bold enough to take the risk for acting on her own behalf in seeking out Jesus for her own encouragement for her healing. Faith in this case is a cooperative effort in which we also work, we also overcome obstacle and in which we sweat with God and others in solving our own problems and bringing healing to ourselves and to the world around us.

And finally I think this passage speaks, I think, of faith that persists in the midst of scoffers and in the midst of doubters and to the grieved family. Jesus persisted and we are called to do the same thing. But the central truth that is found in this passage as well. It is seen in the way that Jesus always responds to the genuine needs of faithful people and how he always responds in a personal way. Jesus did not ask any questions, he didn't give any excuses when Jairus asked, he just went. And similarly, Jesus did not withhold or deny his power to the woman who touched his robe without asking. Jesus' message, I think for those of us who are impatient; for those of us who are frustrated in our search for wholeness, in our search for healing, that God's healing touch has already come

and God's healing touch is still coming to our sometimes broken world and our often wounded spirits. And the personal quality of Jesus response is also noted here as on the way, it is hard to believe that the equivalent of a three alarm fire, Jesus stops in the eyes of his disciples, to pull a cat out of a tree. He took the time to find out who had touched his garment. In fact, he celebrated the importance of personal approach as he allowed the woman with the bleeding condition to touch him, and a woman who, by the way, would have been considered unclean in Jesus society. So in turn touching Jairus' daughter and raising her from death into new life

Finally this text from Mark teaches us Jesus power and authority for healing in the name of God and Jesus Christ, but this power and authority may come in ways and in times when each of us least expect it. For example, the woman only touched Jesus' robe and she was healed, and in addition, Jesus said only two quiet Arabic words to be able to raise a child from death in to life. The point is that unlike the way that we often expect God to operate, Jesus often avoids what is loud; Jesus often avoids what is sensationalism in exchange for what is quiet everyday modest half way of life. We are simply invited to draw near to God in faith and to depend on God as our ultimate source of healing and wholeness

So, what then does this text teach us about faith? I think three very simple things. First of all, we are called upon to be bold enough to ask God for others and ourselves for help as we seek healing and wholeness in this broken world. Secondly, we are invited to depend upon God to response in some personal way for our need for healing, and finally we are to look for that response in quiet and sometimes conventional and unexpected ways. For Jesus said to those who were in distress that day, "Do not fear, only believe." And together we say AMEN.