

**Sermon for Fourth Sunday of Pentecost, June 28, 2009**

2 Samuel 1:1.17-27; Psalm 131, 2 Corinthians 8:7-15, Mark 5:21-43

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Jesus arrived back from the Pagan side of the sea of Tiberius, also known as the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had been in the Decapolis, a region of predominately Greeks who believed in a variety of Gods, where he had gone for perhaps for rest and relaxation. While there, he encountered a man who was chained, who ran naked among the graves and called himself "Legion." Jesus restored him to peace of mind and he wanted to join Jesus and become a disciple. Jesus simply redirected him to *Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his goodness has done for you.* Mark reports, "*Then the man went off and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him, and all were amazed.*"

What is of interest in this portion of the story is that Jesus did not tell the man to study for three years, become a Jew, get circumcised and then come follow him. He gave him no instructions beyond the simple statement that he was to go home and tell his family all that the Lord had done for him.

Jesus then got into a boat and returned to the other side of the Lake, coming to, perhaps, the city of Capernaum, his own city. Mark then records two relatively simple stories one dealing with a woman with a hemorrhage and the other of a man requesting that his daughter be healed.

The man requesting help did not just come up to Jesus and say, "If you have a spare moment, could you drop by my home and cure my daughter who is sick." Mark records '*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.*'

This was no ordinary citizen of Capernaum. As a leader of the synagogue he was responsible for the management of the synagogue; for the conduct of services, who read and who preached. As a synagogue leader he would be one of the more respected men in the community. So, here we have this respected man, a leader in the community, a Pharisee, not only coming to Jesus to ask for help but throwing himself on the ground

begging Jesus to come. To do this he had to his pride and sense of dignity. He did not just ask Jesus to come to his home, *he threw himself at is feet and begged him repeatedly*. He also had to put aside his prejudices about what he thought of this itinerant rabbi. There was no room for prejudice now that his daughter was dying.

Those reading this story or hearing it, might remember the story of Naaman who came to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy. Elisha did not go to see him but sent a message to tell him to go wash seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman was angry and made it clear that the rivers in Egypt were just as good as the Jordan and left. Then his daughter told him to cool his anger and do the simple thing he was asked to do, he did and he was cured. Sometimes we have to lose our prejudice in order to hear the message.

Jairus not only did he overcome his prejudice about this wandering rabbi, he also tapped into his humility. For a person of his social standing it took humility to ask help from this young rabbi.

What was at stake was not only was it his daughter who was dying but it was his twelve year old daughter. In other words, she was of marriageable age; perhaps she was already betrothed to someone from another city who, at this point, did not know she was ill. Perhaps she was his only child and therefore if she died he would have no grandchildren. This man may have had many reasons for setting aside his dignity, his prejudice, his pride in order to come to Jesus.

But at this point we have one of the many interruptions that we experience in the stories of Mark. The story is suspended in order to tell another story. This time it is about a woman who probably should not be in the crowd at all. She is unclean. She suffers from a hemorrhage and has done so for twelve years. She has been suffering for the same length of time that Jairus' daughter has been alive. While Jairus is prominent in the community and wealthy, this woman has lost everything she had. There is no word about her husband, so it is reasonable to believe he divorced her. She suffered at the hands of many doctors and in the process *spent all that she had* and only got worse.

It is worth noting that Mark's jab at doctors is not uncommon in the writings of the time. Attitudes about doctors were mixed. In the Mishnah, the written summary of

the traditional law, talking about the trades that a man may teach his son, Rabbi Judah writes: “ Drivers of donkeys are most of them wicked, camel drivers are most of them proper folk, sailors are most of them saintly, the best among physicians are destined for Gehenna, and the most seemly among butchers is a partner of Amalek.” On the other hand, in the Book of Sirach we read, *Cultivate the physician in accordance with the need of him, for him also had God ordained. It is from God that the physician gets wisdom and from the king he receives gifts.*” Mark, it seems, was one of those who had little trust in physicians.

While Jairus came and publicly begged Jesus to save his daughter, this woman was afraid, she was not sure what to expect, she hoped that by touching the hem of his garment she might be cured. She was willing to suffer more humiliation from the crowd if she was discovered to be there just in the hope of getting well. Unlike Jairus, she was not allowed into the synagogue. Every devout Jew wore an outer robe with four tassels. These were worn in obedience to the command in the Book of Numbers to wear them as a mean of reminding the wearer to keep the commandments. It was one of these that the woman wanted to touch.

No sooner was she healed than Jesus stopped. Another interruption. Jesus felt the power leave him. Anyone who has given of their time to help another knows how drained they can feel afterwards. It is the price of involvement in the life of another human being. In just about every profession you have the one who has been called to it and the one who falls into it for a variety of reasons. The one who is in the profession is also emotionally involved, who feels drained at the end of the day. The gospels report that Jesus had compassion on the crowds. In other words, Jesus felt for others, he felt their pain, he understood their needs and he wanted to help, to make a difference. This woman did not just brush up against him; she touched him and he felt the energy leave him.

The disciples did not understand this. All they could think of was, “What do you expect. You’re walking in a crowd of people, surely someone is going to bump into you.” But Jesus wanted to know who it was that had been healed. The woman could have easily disappeared into the crowd and that may have been the end of it. Instead the story reports

she *came in fear and trembling, fell down before him and told him the whole truth*. Here is another story of humility. This woman had to admit that she broke the law by being in the crowd. And then we see the compassion of Jesus as he told her: *Daughter your faith has made you well; go in peace; and be healed of your disease*. When she touched Jesus she was healed of hemorrhage. When she knelt before Jesus she was made whole, she was healed of her fears. To go in peace, is to be made whole.

Just as this woman is healed, Jesus is interrupted with the news that Jairus' daughter is dead. Jesus' service was no longer needed. There is an underlying assumption here "he can't do anything for her." In other words, the messengers had no faith in Jesus. Jesus ignored the messengers and spoke to Jairus telling him to hold on to his faith and they continued on to the home of Jairus.

The scene at the house would be completely foreign to us today; people were wailing, flute players would be playing, the men would have torn their garments on the right side and no further than the navel and the women would tear their garments in private. The parents would tear their garments on the left side by the heart. The homes on each side of the deceased person would pour out their water, as the angel of death was believed to bring death by dipping his sword in water. If the deceased person was young and not married there was to be something of a wedding ceremony as part of the burial services.

Jesus arrived in time to suspend the mourning and the mourners did not believe him. He took with him the girl's parents and three disciples and raised her from the dead.

It seems strange to tell people to keep something secret when there are so many witnesses to the event. This is a theme in Mark's gospel that Jesus wants what he does to be kept secret, at the same time, those who are to keep it secret are the ones who spread the good news.

The challenge for us today, from this gospel story, is to ask ourselves how humble are we when we pray; what are we doing with our pride and sense of importance in the world. Our socioeconomic status does not matter when it comes to the reality that we are

powerless without God. Before we can effect anything we have to acknowledge our powerlessness, get on our knees, prostrate ourselves, whatever it takes to get us out of our sense of control and importance. There is something about acknowledging our powerlessness, acknowledging our sins and failures that eventually gives us the strength to pray for the knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out. This is the only power we need. The power to do the will of God today. It is when we leave ourselves open to the will of God that we will be restored to life and begin to live once more.

As the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr's prayer puts it: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen."