

“FEAR AND FAITH”

by The Rev. Victor Kim

Mark 5:21-43

(06-27-21) Congregational Ministry Meeting

Well, I'm the next speaker in our summer sermon series and I guess I'll be in conversation with myself, or rather, I'd like to be in conversation with you. Our theme has been, "What's on your mind, What's on your heart?" Obviously, the pandemic and all its ramifications has been a big part of what's been on my mind and heart and I'm excited about our looming return to in church activities, including worshipping together. It will be so wonderful to preach to live people and pray and praise God together and to share in fellowship with one another. I've also been very aware more recently about the health and viability of our denomination, especially in light of the recent decisions made at our General Assembly.

A lot of my conversations with my colleagues and friends revolve around our fears, our fears and worry, our anxiety for our congregations as the pandemic subsides and we physically return to church. What will our congregations look like? Who will return and who will we not see again? What about ideas like Hybrid Church? It's a great concept and we need to be doing it, but do we have the resources, both human and otherwise, to do a good job? Is it sustainable, will it be relevant, how can we be faithful? When we say we want to be missional, will we have the courage to actually live in a way that allows the mission of God to truly live through us, even if it means that many things will need to change? And that fear, worry and anxiety also extends to our larger denomination. Will we stay together, will congregations leave, how will we manage these difficult issues?

So many conversations revolve around our fears, but our text this morning from Mark's gospel, which is the lectionary reading for this Sunday, **tells us about Jesus and his command not to fear but to believe. When we are consumed by fear, Jesus speaks about faith.**

Our text this morning is story of two women, it's actually a story within a story, two stories of two different women, one very young, just a girl really, only 12 years old but very sick and dying, and the other much older, someone who had been suffering from haemorrhages for 12 years. The older woman wasn't as critically ill as the young girl, but in many respects she was living the life of a dead person already, having spent all her money trying to get healed of her disease, enduring much from numerous physicians, but only getting worse.

And because of her condition, she was also considered unclean, which would have rendered her an outcast within Jewish society. She would not have been allowed to go to the temple, which was at the heart of Jewish activity. And the rumours would have spread. What had she done to deserve such a punishment from God? Surely no one suffers as she did without having done something terrible to deserve it!

The young girl's personal situation could not have been more removed from the experience of the older woman. The young girl had a family and a father named Jairus, and he was a leader of the synagogue. It was an important and well respected lay position within Jewish society. We don't know too much about Jairus, but he was likely well connected and well respected. What we do know about him is that he loved his daughter. In a time when girls weren't valued for much more than their potential to become mothers, Jairus cared enough for his daughter to seek out Jesus. And when he found him, he fell at his feet, repeatedly begging him to heal his sick little girl.

And Jesus went with him. But by now the news of Jesus had spread and Jairus wasn't the only one looking for Jesus. The crowds were large and they pressed in on Jesus from every side. Among the crowd was the unnamed woman, the one with the bleeding discharge. She didn't have the connections, there was no way that she could come up to Jesus and ask him to heal her. **So, she crept up on him, silently from the back, hoping against hope to get through the crowd and touch just the hem of his cloak, hoping that it would be enough. And it was! Something changed in her. She knew it right away. So did Jesus.** He stopped. Who touched my clothes? What a question to ask in the midst of a crowd pressing in from all directions! But Jesus would not be deterred. Who touched my clothes? The woman came forward in fear and trembling, she was so used to feeling that way, and she fell down before Jesus and confessed everything. I don't know what she expected Jesus would do, but she probably never expected for him to do what he did next. **Jesus addresses her, not as an outcast, not as someone who is unclean, unable to take part in the temple rituals, but as a daughter. She is restored as a person and she is restored publicly. "Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace," Shalom, and be healed.**

Jairus' heart must have sunk. **She touched him.** That bleeding woman touched Jesus. As a leader of the synagogue, Jairus knew that by the act of touching him, the woman had rendered Jesus unclean. It would take days for Jesus to ritually purify himself. **How could he make it to his daughter in time now?** But before he could even consider the ramifications, the point became moot. News came that his daughter had died. Jesus would no longer be needed, why trouble the teacher any longer? Why indeed! **But Jesus, ever unpredictable, won't be deterred. Don't fear, only believe, he says to Jairus.** And taking just a handful of disciples along with him, he went to Jairus' house. The ceremonial wailing was already underway but Jesus wondered why they were making such a commotion when the child was merely sleeping. The crowds mocked him, but Jesus, taking the young girl's father and mother and three disciples, entered the room where the girl lay. And he took by the hand and said, "little girl, get up." And she did!

I wonder what Jairus felt that moment when Jesus took his little girl by the hand. As far as he knew his daughter was dead already. Touching a corpse also made a person unclean. **But I have to believe that Jairus' feelings about Jesus touching his daughter's hand were probably**

very different than his feelings were about that bleeding woman touching Jesus. Both actions made Jesus unclean. Contact with lepers, people suffering from discharges and the dead, all of these things made a person unclean. In Jewish law uncleanness was considered infectious, so contact was to be avoided at all costs. **But for Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, who would have been intimately familiar with the law, suddenly the law would have seemed very insignificant.**

And isn't it the same with us? How often do we label others as being unacceptable, unclean, **but when it happens to us, when it happens to someone we love, suddenly all the labels don't seem so easy to place.** I said at the beginning that the story in our text is about two women, **but in reality, it's a story about Jesus, which is the case with all the gospel stories.** The story is about Jesus and about how seamlessly he moves between what is kosher and what is not. The text begins with Jesus crossing back on the sea from the other side. The other side is Gentile territory, where they raise pigs. And while there Jesus healed a man possessed by a legion of demons. Talk about unclean. And now back among the Jews, a point emphasized by the number 12, 12 years of bleeding, 12 years old, 12 tribes of Israel, **Jesus goes about tearing down the barriers and obstacles to God's love, God healing and God's restoring grace among God's own people.**

The compassion of God is not limited by what we decide is unclean or unacceptable. Whether Jew or Gentile, clean or unclean, to God, there is no difference. **Where there is need and where need meets faith, healing occurs. Do not fear, only believe.** How often do we, does the church, get caught up in imposing rules and regulations on those who are in need and who are suffering? How often do we declare that God won't do something or that we can't do something because people aren't where we would like them to be? How often do we act as obstacles to need meeting faith? That's not Jesus' way and it can't be the way of God's people. **It's not only when its someone we love that it's okay for Jesus to break the rules. Jesus came to tell us that rules which keep people from experiencing the healing and restoring grace of God, need to be broken.** My friends, this summer, I invite us to think and pray about what kind of example Jesus has set for us, as individuals and as his church. Who do we exclude from the healing and restoring grace of God? Who needs our touch, who needs to be brought in from the margins, who needs to be loved? Our response to these questions are still often rooted in the same kind of thinking that guided the Jewish law. Uncleanness is infectious. And if we get too close to uncleanness, it will make us unclean as well. **But the story today tells us that Jesus takes on that uncleanness and it doesn't make him unclean, rather, he makes the unclean clean by his nature. The truth is that Jesus isn't brought down to our level, rather, he brings us up to his.**

I think about our mission as a church, to engage with our community, to go wide with the world and in doing so, to go deep with God. I think that we're a congregation that's prepared to work for and serve those in need in our communities. I believe we're a people who love

those whom God loves, even if they happen to live on the margins, even if they don't always measure up to the standards that our polite society has set. I know that as we plan for things such as hosting a community meal in our hall or opening up our space to the needs of the community, **we're not driven by our fears, but by our faith. I am confident of the love of this community, of this congregation.** And in the same way I am confident that our response to the recent decisions of the General Assembly **will also be one that is rooted in our faith, not in our fears.** Rather than being consumed by the fear of what might happen to us, Jesus calls us to believe, to have faith, that even when things look hopeless, even when we're staring death straight in the face, **that he's with us and we need to trust that when Jesus is with us, things aren't always what they seem.** We need to move forward with faith, trusting that Jesus can resurrect the dead and that by faith in him, need can meet faith and healing can occur.

We are part of a denomination that has made decisions that say that our Lord, Jesus, moves always to meet need and restore people to community, to the fullness of belonging. We as human beings and often we as the church have set boundaries to mark what is clean and what is unclean. **Where we might be stopped by those boundaries, Jesus moves through them, to meet the need and to bring healing. Rather than being defined by fear, Jesus invites us to be defined by faith, faith in him, his love, his compassion, his welcome and his grace.**

So friends, may we live as a people who have been brought up to the level of Jesus by his compassion and love, and may we live up to the example that has been set for us, that as the people of God, the church of God, we may work to bring need and faith together, so that more and more people would know the healing and restoring grace of God.

And to God be the glory, now and forevermore, Amen.