

2 Samuel 1:1, 7-27
Psalm 130
2 Corinthians 8:7-15
Mark 5:21-43

Proper 8B
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island
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Arise

Some of you know that Jim has been in Eugene watching the track and field Olympic trials for the last week and a half. The trials end today with finals in all his favorite events. He's been looking forward to this for well over a year. He loves track and field in Eugene – he stays at a friend's house, runs on Pre's trail, bicycles to and from events and just really enjoys himself. We talk on the phone most days when he's gone – not every day and not more than once a day – you know Jim, he keeps the feast, whether it's the feast of the ascension or the feast of track and field. So I was surprised when he called for a second time yesterday. Turns out he'd taken a terrible fall off his bike and was calling from the emergency room. He called again at 5 this morning. His shoulder is separated and there is something else very wrong. He can't sit up without a great deal of pain and he can't walk. We don't yet know what's going on... so we're both feeling pretty vulnerable. And neither of us is particularly accustomed to that. It's especially hard because he is so far away. It helps me understand what people have been going through in Covidtime – unable to be with the ones we love in hard times and good times.

Being alone makes a person feel so very vulnerable. Being sick and alone is even worse. That's the situation the woman in today's gospel reading has been in for 12 long years. With the lifeblood pouring out of her, she was impure, defiled and untouchable. Purity laws were incredibly important for the Jews, and this woman should not have been in close proximity to anyone, under any circumstances on that day – or on any other day during those twelve long years. When we realize that, we can begin to imagine something of her heartache and desperation. And perhaps we can see why she risked everything because she believed that touching Jesus' garments would heal her. Not only had she endured physical pain and suffering, she had suffered the loss of her humanity because she'd been forced to the outside edges of a society that shunned sick people. She spent all the money she ever had on doctors who could not cure her and so for twelve long years she had been completely isolated, devoid of human companionship or human touch. Think about these past many months of not being able to be with, let alone hug your family or your friends... for her, it had been 12 years. I cannot begin to imagine the depth of her suffering and vulnerability.

This woman who is so unimportant that we don't even know her name, is not the only vulnerable one in today's gospel. Although his life circumstances were very different, the synagogue official Jairus was in a profoundly vulnerable place too. Yes, he had power, prestige, money and authority, but none of that could cure his dying child. The contrast between the very important religious leader and the very unimportant and sickly woman really couldn't be any greater. Yet as different as their outward circumstances were, their internal landscapes were

very much alike. They were both desperate, both willing to cross cultural boundaries to get what they needed, both profoundly vulnerable. And they were both in the same crowd that day. Hoards of people had turned out, hoping to witness a miracle healing for the important synagogue official's daughter. Everyone was rushing, because minute by minute, the life was seeping out of her. Every minute, every second mattered. And still, the unclean and unimportant woman took a chance on the only hope she had and interrupted the whole important people procession. Can you imagine it?

It was as though time stood still. In the midst of frantically trying to get to Jairus' daughter, Jesus felt healing power go out of him. "Who touched me?" he asked. "Who touched me?" The truth is, everybody was touching him, but he wanted to know about the person who touched him when he'd felt the power go out of him. Everyone else thought he should hurry to get to the important man's daughter – and he could have kept rushing along to the dying child, but that wasn't what he did. Instead, he stopped the whole procession. "Who touched me?" We don't know what she said – that's another thing that tells us how unimportant she was – but Mark says she told Jesus the whole truth – everything that had happened to her.

It would have been enough just to have the bleeding stop. That alone would have given new life to the woman. But Jesus gave her so much more. "*Daughter, your faith has made you well...*" Not "your faith has made you well," but "*DAUGHTER, your faith has made you well.*" She had been cured of her disease by touching Jesus' clothes. But she was healed when Jesus listened to her, when he really saw her, and when he welcomed her into the family of God.

If Jesus hadn't stopped the procession to Jairus' house, if he had decided that curing the woman of her ailment was enough, this precious daughter of God would not have known herself as beloved. Jesus didn't make any pronouncements or lay hands on her or pray over her to cure her illness – he hadn't even been aware of her presence until she touched the hem of his garment. But when he felt the healing power go out of him, he wanted to know why. Or who. So the woman came back, fell down before him and told him the whole truth. And Jesus saw her – really saw her for the beauty that she was. Jesus welcomed her back into community, called her "daughter," welcoming her into the family of God, into the abundant life God wants for us. He hadn't just cured her disease. He healed her, made her whole... he gave her new life. Then just as Jesus spoke his parting words of life and peace to her, we learn that Jairus' daughter had died.

Did Jesus trade the life of an older, unwanted nobody of a woman, for the life of a little 12 year-old girl filled with promise? That's what the crowd would have thought, you know. "You wasted your healing on that old nobody of a woman when you could have saved the child of someone we value, someone who actually matters." When Jesus let the power go out of him to heal that woman, they probably thought there was no healing power left in him, and so the child died. While that's not the way God's love works - God's love never runs out, all Jairus had heard was that his daughter was dead. "*Do not be afraid*" Jesus said to him. "*Only believe.*" "*The little girl is only sleeping*" Jesus told the weeping and wailing crowd. And then, in the presence of only

Jesus' most intimate friends and this little girl's most intimate family, another miracle occurred. With a gentle touch and the gentle words, "*Talitha cum*" the little girl was raised from the dead.

Did you notice that the synagogue leader needed to be reminded to believe and that the unnamed, unclean woman was willing to violate every cultural boundary that existed because her belief was so strong? Look at her picture on your bulletin cover. She's there, do you see her? Do you see her life? Do you see her desperation? Do you see her faith? Sometimes the "least of these" have the most to teach us.

We do need to be careful with stories such as these. Jesus' beautiful words "*Daughter, your faith has made you well*" have been used to shame people who are already suffering greatly. Your faith has made you well, doesn't mean you've been faithful enough so you are well. It doesn't mean you've prayed well enough so you're well. It doesn't mean you are good enough a person so you're well. It doesn't mean your faith has cured you. This kind of thinking is not only cruel, it's arrogant. We are not the ones doing the miracle working! God is God. We are not. That's a theme Jesus is working on a lot these days.

There's a tension in these stories. I know several people right now who could justifiably be asking "Where's my miracle?" The truth is, we live in bodies and bodies get broken or wear out or refuse to behave the way we wish they would. Grave illness happens because we live in bodies, not because God wills it. God's will for us is wholeness. Healing miracles are hard for a preacher like me, because sometimes the ones I love are not cured. But that's one of the many ways this story is so beautiful... Jesus restores us to life - the kind of life where every single person, even the ones on the most raggedy edges, ***are beloved and belong***. There's curing and there's healing and we'd be wise not to confuse the two. Being restored to right relationship with God, with each other and with ourselves is what brings healing, and God wants to do that with all of us.

There are things in this world that will bring all of us to our knees, and it is in the face of suffering and vulnerability that Jesus draws all of us to himself, Gentile, Jew, child, elder, rich, poor, white, black and brown... God values all of them, all of us, equally, including the people who make us really mad. Everyone belongs. Everyone can be healed, no matter how sick their body is. Everyone can be restored to right relationship. And everyone must be cared for. As St Paul tells us, *if one member suffers, all suffer together... if one member is honored, all rejoice ...* Jesus responded to the unnamed woman and the unnamed child and the clearly named important man in exactly the same way, speaking into their vulnerability and bringing God's life-giving love and peace. It's what Jesus always does. You see, it doesn't matter one bit who we are. We're all somehow broken. And it's our brokenness that Jesus is drawn to.

Jesus has the words of life for us all. While there is no escape from mortality, his words permeate even that. We can all offer those words of life and love and encouragement to one another. Each one of us can stretch out a hand and say "*Talitha cum*".... Little girl, little boy, migrant, refugee, homeless, broken, sick or heartsick soul... arise. Amen.