

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

Proper 8B
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island
July 1, 2018
The Rev. Karen Haig

I have a few very vivid memories of my early childhood, and one of them is of a fire station. I remember going to the fire station and standing in a very long line my little sister and I on either side of our mother, each of us holding one of her hands. I remember feeling dangerously close to fire trucks that seemed ginormous next to my little girl self. I remember the color red all around me. And pink. I remember the color pink.

I remember a little pink squiggle on a little white sugar cube. We had come to the fire station for our polio vaccines, the first ones given by mouth instead of injection. It's funny that I would remember the details of that day, but I remember them as vividly as anything else from that time in my childhood. As it turns out, the fire station day was a monumental day in my life. I was one of the ones who received a live vaccine, and instead of preventing polio in me, that little white sugar cube with the little pink vaccine squiggle on it actually gave me the disease. And while most of my body grew the way it was supposed to, something went very wrong in one of my legs.

Over the course of the next couple of years, I spent countless hours with doctors and therapists as they struggled to figure out what was wrong with me. Because I'd been vaccinated, it was a very long time before it occurred to anyone that I might have polio. And all the while my friends were at dance lessons, playing kickball, at the beach or otherwise occupied with being little kids, I was enduring lengthy therapy appointments and countless, sometimes painful tests. It was bad enough that I couldn't walk properly. What was worse, was that I had lost my place in my little girl world, lost some sense of a carefree childhood, lost my sense of belonging.

I remember all of this each time I hear the story of this desperate hemorrhaging woman who had been so very ill for so very many years, the woman who risked everything to touch the hem of Jesus' cloak. She did risk everything, you know. In her world, women never, ever approached men and they certainly didn't touch them. That was true for any woman. When we add the reality of her medical condition, a condition that defined her as impure, defiled, untouchable, when we realize that she should not have been in close proximity to anyone, under any circumstances during those twelve long years, we can begin to imagine something of her desperation.

Not only had she endured physical pain and suffering, she had suffered the loss of her humanity because she'd been forced to the raggedy edges of a society that shuns the unwell. She spent all the money she ever had on doctors who could not cure her and so for twelve long years she had

been cast away, devoid of human companionship or human touch. I cannot begin to imagine the depth of her suffering.

This woman who is so insignificant as not even to be named is not the only vulnerable one in today's gospel. Although his life circumstances are very different from the unnamed woman, the synagogue official Jairus is in a very vulnerable place too. All of his power and authority, all of his money and his very important and prestigious position cannot cure his dying little girl. The gospel writer emphasizes the contrast between Jairus' position and the unnamed woman's position - he's doing everything he can to make things clear for us. The contrast between this very important religious community leader and the sickly unnamed woman couldn't be any greater. Yet as different as they are, they share an extraordinary vulnerability. It's those things that bring us to our knees – grave illness, the death of a loved one, addiction or other terrible tragedy – these are the things that level the playing field for humans.

Two people from profoundly different circumstances. Two people in profoundly similar circumstances. So, how does Jesus respond?

Jairus, prominent in the synagogue system and a well-known community figure, is someone of great importance. That's why all those people were following Jesus as he made his way to Jairus' home. While nobody noticed the unnamed woman, everybody knew who Jairus was. As the crowd was hurrying along, that impure, insignificant woman whose name we never know interrupted the feverish procession. Can you imagine it? Hoards had turned out, hoping to witness a miracle healing for this very important man's daughter. Everyone was rushing, because minute by minute, the life was seeping out of that little girl. Every minute, every single second mattered. And then something happened that seemed to make time stand still. In the midst of frantically trying to get to Jairus' daughter, Jesus noticed a very particular touch that made the healing power go forth from him. "Who touched me?" he asked. "Who touched me?"

I must confess that when we get to this part of the story, I can't help but ask myself, "Why is he asking that? Surely he knows who touched him." After all he's just made a miracle without even working at it, surely he knew who touched him. But whether he did or he didn't, the gospel writer is making a different point. Jesus could have kept rushing along to the important man's dying child, but that's not what he did. Instead he stopped the whole procession.

"Who touched me?"

I don't think Jesus asked that question because he didn't know who touched him. I think he asked that question so that the woman could be truly healed. Not just cured of her hemorrhage, but truly, fully healed. We don't get to hear her words – that helps us remember how unimportant she is but we're told she said everything that had happened, to Jesus. It would have been enough for the bleeding to stop, but Jesus did what God always does and welcomed this unimportant, unnamed woman into the family of God. Do you remember what he said to her?

“Daughter, your faith has made you well.” Not “your faith has made you well.” “DAUGHTER, your faith has made you well.”

If Jesus hadn't stopped the procession to Jairus' house, if he had let the cure be enough, this beloved daughter of God would not have known herself as beloved. It would all have been about Jesus the miracle maker and surely that would have been plenty. But our God wants abundant life for us, and abundant life doesn't exist when we don't know ourselves as God's beloved or when we're disconnected from community. So Jesus welcomes the unnamed woman back into community, and just as he speaks his parting words of peace, we learn that Jairus' daughter has died.

Did Jesus trade the life of an older, unwanted nobody of a woman, for the life of a little girl filled with promise, a little girl only twelve years old? It'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.” When Jesus let the power go forth from him to heal that woman, they probably thought there was nothing left for the little girl... the one now proclaimed to be dead. But that's not the way God's love works.

“Do not be afraid” Jesus tells the desperate father. “Only believe.” It's so interesting that this synagogue leader needs to be reminded to believe and that the unnamed, defiled woman was willing to violate every cultural boundary that existed because her belief was so incredibly strong. Sometimes the “least of these” have the most to teach us.

“The little girl is only sleeping” Jesus tells the crowd. And then, in the presence of only Jesus' most intimate friends and this little girl's most intimate family, something miraculous occurs. With a gentle touch and the gentle words, “Talitha cum” the little girl is raised from the dead. So Jesus too has crossed all the boundaries – not just the cultural boundaries, but the greatest boundary of all - the boundary between life and death.

Do you see what is happening here? By interrupting the healing for the important people, Jesus makes clear the particular value of every human life. By interrupting and even overturning death, he makes clear the power of God's love. Jesus doesn't just raise up the lowly in these stories, he raises the dead. And when he does that we're reminded that resurrection is our story and that death – no matter if it's a literal death or one of the many little deaths we experience all throughout our lives – death never, ever wins.

Jesus responds 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. This is what Jesus always does. As it turns out, it doesn't matter one bit who we are. Doesn't matter how good, how rich, how important we are. We're all somehow broken, and it's our brokenness that Jesus is drawn to.

There's a tension in these stories. I know many people right now who could justifiably be asking “Where's my miracle?” in the face of these stories and the stories of their own lives. The truth

is, we live in bodies and bodies will not always behave the way we wish they would. Grave illness happens because we live in bodies, not because God wills it. Healing miracles are hard for a preacher like me, because sometimes the ones we love may not be cured. Yet that's one of the many ways this story is so beautiful. Jesus restores life, not just physical life, but a kind of life where every single person, even the ones on the most raggedy edges, are beloved and belong. Being restored to right relationship is what matters. For everyone. Everyone belongs. And until every single person is cared for, we cannot be whole. And because we really are the hands and feet and heart and face of Christ in the world, this story has particular meaning for us.

There are things in this world that will bring all of us to our knees, and in the face of suffering Jesus draws all of us to himself, Gentile and Jew, child and elder, rich and poor, white and brown... there really is no difference in God's eyes. Everyone belongs. Everyone must be restored to right relationship. Everyone must be cared for. As St Paul tells us, *If one member suffers, all suffer together...; if one member honored, all rejoice together ... 1 Corinthians 12:26*

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 or heartsick soul... rise.

Amen