

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

Proper 8B  
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The Rev. Karen Haig

### Rise

I have very few vivid memories of my early childhood, but one of them is of a fire station. I remember going to the fire station and standing in a very long line with my mother and my sister. I remember feeling dangerously close to fire trucks that seemed ginormous next to my little girl self, I remember 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 vaccinations, 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 squiggle actually gave me the disease. And while most of my body grew the way it was supposed to, something went wrong with one of my legs.

Over the course of the next couple of years, I spent many hours with doctors and therapists as they struggled to figure out what was wrong with me. Because I'd been vaccinated, it was a long time before it occurred to anyone that I might have had polio. And while my friends were at hula lessons, playing kickball, at the beach or otherwise occupied with being little kids, I was experiencing lengthy therapy appointments and sometimes painful tests.

It was bad enough that I couldn't walk properly. What was worse, though, was that I had lost my place in my little girl world, had 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 woman who had been so very ill for so very many years, the woman who risked everything to touch the hem of Jesus' clothes.

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, we can begin to imagine something of her desperation. In addition to her 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 people who are 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 shunned, devoid of human companionship, devoid of human touch. I cannot begin to imagine the depth of her vulnerability and her suffering.

This woman who was so insignificant 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 from the unnamed woman's, Jairus was in a very vulnerable place too. All of his power and authority, all of his money and his very important and prestigious position could not cure his dying little girl. The contrast between this very important religious community leader and the sickly unnamed woman couldn't be much greater. Yet as different as their outward circumstances were, their internal landscapes were very much alike. They were both absolutely desperate, both profoundly vulnerable, both willing to cross forbidden boundaries, both willing to risk pretty much everything to get what they needed. There are things that bring us all to our knees – grave illness, the death of a loved one, addiction or other terrible tragedy – and these are the things that level the playing field for humans.

Two people, profoundly different. Two people in profoundly similar circumstances. And they were both in the same crowd that day. The crowd had gathered because of Jesus, of course, but also because of Jairus and his very important position in the community. As they were making their way to witness what they all hoped would be the next great miracle, the unnamed, unclean, insignificant woman interrupted the feverish procession. Can you imagine it? Hoards had turned out, hoping for a miracle healing for this very important man's daughter. Jesus was rushing, rushing, because the life was seeping out of the little girl and every second mattered. But when Jesus felt the healing power go out of him he stopped. It was as though time stopped. *"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 everything.

*"Who touched me?"*

I don't think he asked that question because he didn't know who it was, I think he asked that question so that the woman could come back and be truly healed. Not just cured of the bleeding, but fully healed. We don't know what she said, but we're told she said the whole truth to Jesus.

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. 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."* She had been cured of her disease by touching Jesus' clothes. But she was healed when Jesus stopped and listened to her, when he saw her, when he welcomed her as a beloved daughter, into the family of God. If Jesus hadn't stopped the procession to Jairus' house, if the bleeding had simply stopped, the woman would never have known herself as a beloved daughter of God. 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 clothes. But when he felt the healing power go out of him, he wanted to know why. Or who. So when she came back, fell at his feet and told him the whole truth, Jesus saw her, called her *“Daughter”* and welcomed her back into her community and into the family of God. He hadn’t just cured her disease. He’d healed her, made her whole, given her new life. And just as he spoke his parting words of life and peace to her, Jairus’ daughter died.

Did Jesus trade the life of an old woman who’d been sick for twelve years, for the life of a twelve-year-old girl filled with promise? It’s what the crowd would have thought, you know. The kinds of miracles Jesus performed would have been seen as a sort of magic in the ancient world, magic that got used up and needed replenishing. When Jesus let the power go out of him to heal that woman, they probably thought there was nothing left for the little girl. But that’s not the way God’s love works. God’s love never runs out.

*“Do not be afraid”* Jesus told the desperate father. *“Only believe.”* It’s so interesting that this synagogue leader needs to be reminded to believe and the unnamed, unclean woman did not. Sometimes the “least of these” have the most to teach us. *“She’s only sleeping”* Jesus told the crowd. And then Jesus said, *“Talitha cum, little girl, rise”* and she was raised from the dead. Jesus crossed religious and cultural boundaries all the time. This time he crossed the boundary between life and death.

Do you see what is happening here? By interrupting the healing of the important people, Jesus shows us the value of every human life. By interrupting and even overturning death, Jesus shows us the power of God’s love. Jesus didn’t just raise up the lowly in these stories, he raised the dead, reminding us that resurrection is our story and that death – whether literal death or one of the many little deaths we experience throughout our lives – death never has the last word.

There are things in this world that will bring all of us to our knees, and in the face of that sort of suffering and vulnerability, Jesus draws all of us to himself, Gentile, Jew, child, elder, rich, poor, straight, gay, trans, black, brown, white ... God values all of us equally. Everyone belongs. Everyone can be healed, no matter how ill their body is. We can die fully healed, fully restored to right relationship with God, with others, with ourselves. 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. So 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 mortality. 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, marginalized, lonely, forgotten, homeless, broken, sick or heartsick soul... Rise. Amen