Sermon July 1, 2018

Mark 5:21-43

Rev. Vikki Clayton

“Daughter, your faith has made you well.”

Today we have two stories from the gospel of Mark that reflect a special literary technique of his: interweaving two distinct stories so that they interact and shed light onto each other.

The first story begins with the leader of the synagogue, named Jairus, approaching Jesus in order to beg him to heal his daughter who is at “the point of death”. If Jesus would just come and lay his hands on her, she may be made well and live.

Jairus is a true believer in Jesus’ power to heal.

Then Mark places the second story in the midst of the first one. It’s as if we were watching a movie by a famous director who can deftly take the viewer’s focus from two people in a crowd, zoom out to pan over the heads of the people in the crowd, and then zoom in on one woman standing in the middle of the crowd.

We’re so involved in watching where the camera takes us, we watch with rapt attention. “Who is this woman?” we wonder. “Why is she important to the story?”

And here is where Mark ever so subtly draws us into her story. As we hear her story we begin to make comparisons:

* we are not told the woman’s name, but we know Jairus’ name,
* the woman has been struggling with a life threatening illness for 12 years, Jairus’ daughter (who is 12) is near death,
* the woman is hesitant about approaching Jesus, Jairus runs right up to him and kneels before him,
* both see Jesus as the one who can save them from suffering, and
* both display their faith through action, but in very different ways

Jesus listens to Jairus’ story and begins to go to heal his daughter. As he walks through the crowd he is interrupted by the woman, for Jesus can feel his power leave his body when she touches the hem of his robe and the healing power is immediately transferred from Jesus to the woman.

At first, Jesus has no idea who touched him. He asks his disciples and they throw their hands in the air, “How can we know with all these people around us?”

Then, the woman, trembling and in fear, falls down before Jesus and tells him “her whole truth”.

This intimate moment is the moment when she brings all her past suffering to Jesus and lays her burdens at his feet: the shame of being seen as ‘unclean’ by her community, the shunning done by her neighbors, the money she spent (all her savings) on physicians who in the end could not help her, and finally her last desperate effort to find solace was to reach out to him.

The message our gospel writer Mark wants us to understand is that Jesus was willing to be interrupted, he paused when he was on his way to bring a young woman from death, in order to pronounce to another that his power to heal will bring her everlasting peace.

Can you identify with the unnamed woman in today’s story?

Jairus had no problem with interrupting Jesus as he prepared to address the crowd. Afterall, Jairus was a leader of the synagogue, and he was used to talking about his faith in God. The woman, though, wasn’t so outwardly bold at first, “If I just touch his clothes I will be healed.”

I imagine some here may identify with the woman, a little shy about proclaiming your faith.

You see, though, the woman’s faith was not shown by her reaching out to touch Jesus’ robe; that was out of desperation and maybe a little superstition. This is similar to bargaining prayer. “God, I promise I’ll be more \_\_\_\_\_\_ if you’d please answer my prayer.” Never the less, this action was the basis of her prayer.

In actuality, her faith came alive when she spoke with Jesus directly; laying all her burdens, her sorrows and concerns at his feet. And she was only able to do this once she realized her story was worthy of Jesus’ full attention.

And this realization, this courage to open her heart to him, came to her when she experienced his healing grace.

Do you see where I’m going with this train of thought?

What began as a desperate, maybe even a superstitious, attempt to receive healing, became her path to finding true faith.

She hoped she would be healed, but she wasn’t sure.

This hope gave her the courage to reach out to him and she was healed.

But her hope turned into faith only when she spoke directly to Jesus about her life. Then, not only was she healed, she became blessed with peace.

Receiving peace can only happen when we open our life to Christ. And we can only open our life to him when we realize it is worthy of his attention. And we realize our life is worthy of his attention when we’ve experienced the healing power of his love. And we experience the power of his love when we reach out to him in prayer.

Or more simply put:

Prayer (no matter it’s basis) gets Christ’s attention; which leads to healing; which leads to self worth; which leads to an open heart and desire to proclaim your faith; which leads to peace.

Receiving peace can only happen when we open our life to Christ.

May your prayers be bold and freely given. For Christ finds your life interesting and worthy of attention.