

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

JULY 1, AD 2018

Lutheran Service Book Lectionary

Lectionary Series B, Proper 8

Mark 5:21-43

²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. ²²Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet ²³and implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." ²⁴And he went with him.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. ²⁵And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, ²⁶and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." ²⁹And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

³⁰And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" ³¹

And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'"

³²And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in

fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. ³⁴And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"

³⁶But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

³⁹And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. ⁴³And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Off and on through each year you & I hear Biblical accounts of the numerous miracles performed by Christ. They never surprise us, because we've heard them so long, and because we believe that the man who performs them is God's Son. Long ago, we realize, these events astounded people at the time, but they do not astound us. This is a problem you & I must work to overcome, as this morning we ponder a double miracle by Christ that loomed so large in the mind of the early church, that we find it recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Let's begin by focusing not on our Lord but on those he blesses. The crowd swirling in around Him is loud & noisy, but Mark draws our focus toward the inner thoughts and the words of these two individuals. How is the behavior of the unnamed woman very much like that of Jairus, the synagogue president? Both exhibit a strong faith in Christ. Each is determined to make contact with him.

Is faith strong in your own mind and heart? When you are beset with problems, do you

persistently go to the Lord for help? Or do troubles easily overthrow your faith and move you away from God? Without diminishing the importance of our all being members of the Body of Christ, of our fellowship in the Spirit, keep in mind how God calls each one of us to himself individually. One Baptism unites us, but day by day each one of us lives out our vocation, and each of us faces his or her own set of trials. We all confess the same Creed and say the same Lord's Prayer, but how well we remain standing in that faith under stress, and how consistently we turn to the Lord in prayer, varies. This man and this woman in today's Gospel are here as a lesson to us.

And so, while today's Gospel certainly affirms the divine power over life and death that Jesus possessed – with both of these people Christ accomplishes instantly what no physician had been able to do – this double-miracle is also about the nature of faith, the genuine faith that both the woman and the synagogue president demonstrate. Even when word arrives that his daughter has died, Jairus does not laugh but leads Jesus to his house in the hope that Christ has the power to save his daughter.

Likewise, Mark tells us that this woman whom the Lord healed had suffered for more than a decade, and paying for medical care until eventually she went broke. But although all she had to show for it was a worsened condition., we find her pushing & twisting through the crowd, confident that if she can but touch his cloak, she will at last be set free.

Those who refuse to believe in God never do pray; they have no faith to lose. But often men & women who have believed in God hit a spiritual wall when disaster strikes. Whether the crisis is medical or otherwise, you or I can be overwhelmed by grief, or filled with such despair, that we cease to believe there is a God who can rescue us.

This is why both of these miracles serve as such powerful lessons to us. We may be certain that for years this woman of Galilee not only spend money but also prayed. Night after night, year after year she besought the Lord God to deliver her from this debilitating affliction. She may well have wondered why he had not done so, she no doubt shed tears when she prayed; but when the Son of God came to her town there still burned in her the flame of faith that the God in whom she had trusted would at last answer her need.

The other miracle in today's Gospel, of course, has a different dimension to it. You may

recall from John's Gospel the story of Lazarus. This account is much the same, for it is obvious here, too, that Christ has taken his time so as to allow this young girl to die. In so doing he achieves two purposes: He reveals to his disciples and others that he has power even over death. But in so doing he also summons this father to a new level of faith – a faith that not even the event of death can extinguish.

I need not tell you how much prayer in the lives of Christians has to do with disease, injury, and the threat of death. The first time I was first required to carry the Gospel into the E. R., or to pray with people in a surgery waiting room, was in the summer of 1975, as a young chaplain intern in St. Louis. Since that time it has never gotten easy. How many families of Immanuel – how many of you – just in the last ten years, have waited and prayed, wrestled with God and wept, in such places?

But these wrenching experiences show you, not that you are lacking in faith, but that it is through such ordeals that your faith matures and grows. We never know how or when God shall answer this kind of prayer. This is why we learn to pray from the Lord Jesus himself. Yes, we learn how in the prayer he taught us – but we learn more, perhaps, from how Christ himself prayed. We learn in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done." But we truly learn the meaning of this petition by following Christ to Gethsemane, and from Gethsemane to Calvary.

For if it was through such a painful death that Christ brought life to the world, and if the only road to the throne at God's right hand led him through the grave, think of what that teaches you about how to pray! On the one hand, we have a God who has the power and willingness to heal our bodies, preserve our lives, and prolong our days on earth. At the same time, this God also has shown us that his purpose in Christ is to take us from this vale of tears to a far better place. And so, yes, the healing of this girl shows us that our Lord can and often does rescue us from the jaws of death; but it also reminds us that his greatest life-saving act in the life of his servants is to make death his means of delivering them from all their troubles.

Finally, there is the question, not of what we should expect from God, but why we should expect good things from him. Everybody probably figured that the Jairus stood a fairly good chance of receiving his request; after all, he would not have been chosen for such a prestigious and vital post had he not exhibited some degree of piety. In contrast to him is this woman

carving her way the crowd about whom people probably said, “Who is this person?” But the result is that the Lord performs his mercy regardless of differences that people may see. No matter who you are or what you have done, the words of Luther apply;

We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them; but we pray that he would give them all by grace.

To pray “in Jesus’s name” is not merely some doctrinal formality, certainly not a magical formula. We pray in Jesus’ name realizing that only he, the Son who died for us, gives us sinners the bold confidence to ask God the Father for anything, large or small. To pray in Jesus name also shows that we pray while following in his footsteps, aware that we enter the kingdom only by passing through afflictions; and that death itself, far from separating us from God’ love, has been transformed by the light of Jesus’ resurrection. ❖