

The 6th Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: July 1, 2018

Proper 8: Mark 5:21-43: *Jesus Love Us to Life*

Preached

By

The Rev. John E. Higginbotham

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A business executive became depressed. Things were not going well at work, and he was bringing his problems home with him every night. Every evening he would eat his dinner in silence, shutting out his wife and five-year-old daughter. Then he would go into the den and read the paper using the newspaper to wall his family out of his life. After several nights of this, one evening his daughter took her little hand and pushed the newspaper down. She then jumped into her father's lap, wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him strongly. The father said abruptly, "Honey, you are hugging me to death!" "No, Daddy," the little girl said, "I'm hugging you to life!"

This was the greatness of Jesus. He took people where they were and hugged them to life. That is precisely what we see Jesus doing in this dramatic Gospel reading in Mark 5. This passage is fascinating because here we have a story

within a story. We have two healing stories rolled into one and the people involved could not be more different.

On the one hand, the family of Jairus represented the “upper crust” of society. Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue. He was a man of substance, rich and powerful and religiously prominent. He represented the Elite of Society, especially the religious world, but this day Jairus was sick with worry. His 12-year-old daughter was dying.

On the other hand, the hemorrhaging woman in the crowd was a social outcast. She was considered ritually unclean as one who was under the judgment of God and therefore not allowed to set foot in the synagogue. In this magnificent passage, these two vastly different people are loved into life by our Lord.

Jesus and His disciples had been going from town to town. He had been preaching the gospel and healing people. Large crowds were coming out. They were clamoring to see Jesus and hear Him. One day this man called Jairus came looking for Jesus. He falls down on his knees at the feet of Jesus and begs him to come to his house because his only daughter was gravely ill and dying. Jesus agreed to go with him and as they went, people began to press in around Jesus. Mark puts it dramatically: “And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.” The people were so excited to be near Jesus that they

were pushing and shoving and crowding in close to Him.

The woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years tried everything she knew. She spent all her money on physicians, but there was no relief for her problem. No one had been able to cure her. So, in desperation slips behind Jesus, working her way through the crowd and when no one seemed to be looking, she reached out tentatively, almost fearfully, and touched the hem of His robe. At once, the hemorrhaging stopped. For the first time in 12 years, the flow of blood stopped.

At the same time, Jesus felt something special happen. It was a unique touch and He felt strength go out of Him. Immediately, Jesus stopped. He turned around and asked, "Who touched me?" The disciples were astonished by the question in the midst of all the pushing and shoving. "What do you mean, 'who touched you?' Everybody's touching you."

You see, they couldn't tell a push and a shove from a touch. But, Jesus could! He knew the difference and He knew that it was a tender touch that drew strength out of Him. The woman had not expected to be noticed, but when Jesus turned and asked that question, she knew that He knew, and she came forward trembling and she fell at His feet and confessed that she was the one who had touched the hem of His garment. She explained in a rush of words why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly cured. Graciously,

Jesus lifted her up and said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Notice how gentle and loving Jesus is with her as He gives her a new lease on life. He doesn’t chastise her for interrupting him. He doesn’t critique her theology or her superstitious expectations. He doesn’t rebuke her for seeing Him as a sort of last resort. Instead, He gives her act the most gracious reception. And although we know the healing came from Him, He humbly gives her the credit. “Your faith has made you well,” He says to her.

Now, the rest of the story is even more remarkable. Jesus is told that Jairus’ daughter has died! I’m sure at that moment Jairus was absolutely devastated. His beloved daughter was snatched away. But again, Jesus is gracious and generous and loving. I can just imagine Him touching Jairus’ shoulder and saying, “Don’t be afraid now; only believe, and she will be made well.” They go on to the house. The people are weeping and mourning. They scoff at him for thinking he can do anything about this. But Jesus goes into the house, and He resurrects that little girl. Jesus loves her into life, and then, I really love this, He tells them to give her something to eat.

Now, let’s look closely at the power of love and the amazing, incredible things love can accomplish when it is given and when it is received.

First of all, love has the power to heal. Medical Science is now confirming what many of us believed all along, that love plays a big part in the healing process. When I taught Allied Health Sciences, I would always tell my students, “Remember this. Physicians treat, only God heals.” Love has the power to heal physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

My sisters and brothers, have you heard the legend of the Fisher King? When the Fisher King was a boy, he was sent out to spend the night alone in the forest as a test of his courage to be king. During the night, he had a vision of the Holy Grail, the cup used by our Lord at the Last Supper, surrounded by great flames of fire. Immediately, he became excited by the prospect of wealth and glory that would be his by possessing such a great prize. Greedily, he reached into the flames to grab the Holy Grail, but the flames were too much and he was severely burned. As the years went by, the Fisher King became more despondent and alone and his wound grew deeper. One day the Fisher King, feeling sad and depressed and in pain, went for a walk in the forest. He came upon a court jester. “Are you all right?” the jester asked. “Is there anything I can do for you, anything at all?” “Well, I am very thirsty,” the Fisher King replied. The jester took an old dilapidated cup from an old burlap bag, filled it with water from a nearby stream, and gave it to the Fisher King. As the Fisher King drank, he suddenly felt his wound healing for the

first time. Incredibly the old cup he was drinking from had turned into the Holy Grail. “What wonderful magic do you possess?” the Fisher King asked the jester. The jester just shrugged and said, “I know no magic. All I did was get a drink for a thirsty soul.”

This old legend underscores a great truth that is writ large in the scriptures, namely this, greed and selfishness bring pain and suffering, but love brings healing and life. We see it here in Mark 5 as Jesus reaches out to the hemorrhaging woman and the daughter of Jairus. Truly, love has the power to heal.

Second, love has the power to reconcile. This is why Jesus insisted that the one who had touched the hem of His garment come forward. This woman was made ritually unclean by her hemorrhage. She was not permitted to set foot in the synagogue. She was a social outcast. Jesus wanted to make it clear to everyone that she was well. Jesus not only healed her, Jesus restored her to an active life. Jesus not only reconciled her with the community, Jesus reconciled her with herself. Jesus removed the toxic shame that the hemorrhage brought with it. Jesus removed the stigma and the shame that alienated her from life. My sisters and brothers, Jesus Christ is the Reconciler, but as the Apostle Paul challenges us, we can be “agents of reconciliation” when we live in the spirit of love. Because, love has the power to heal. Love has the power to

reconcile. Love has the power to remove our shame.

Finally, love has the power to redeem. Let me ask you something and be honest now. Do you know the redeeming love of Christ in your life? Was there a point in your life that Jesus turned your life around? Has Jesus loved you into life?

There is a beautiful old story about Zacchaeus the tax collector. It tells how in later years, he rose early every morning and left his house. His wife, curious, followed him one morning. At the town well, he filled a bucket and he walked until he came to a sycamore tree. There, setting down the bucket, he began to clean away the stones, the branches, and the rubbish from around the base of the tree. Having done that, he poured water on the roots and stood there in silence, gently caressing the trunk with both of his hands. When his amazed wife came out of hiding and asked what he was doing, Zacchaeus replied simply, “This is where I found Christ!”

I can just imagine that for the rest of their lives, that woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ robe that day on the street, and the daughter of Jairus who was raised up in that room in her home, continually brought people back to those sacred spots and said, “This is where I found Christ! This is where Christ loved me into life!”

My sisters and brothers, do you have a sacred spot like that? This is the Good News; this is the gospel of our Christian faith, isn't it? Love has the power to heal, love has the power to reconcile, and love has the power to redeem.

AMEN.