

The 5th Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: June 27, 2021

Proper 8: Mark 5: 21-43: *Your Faith Has Made You Well!*

Preached

By

The Rev. John E. Higginbotham+

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

So, we begin. If it weren't for faith and trust, we would have no exploration, no discoveries, no feats of wonder, no inventions, no advances in medicine, or relationships. Every step we take toward something new, unknown, or the unexplored leads us into a territory of faith. Like walking across a bridge over a gaping cavern or the step into utter darkness believing in a floor beneath our feet. Faith and trust allow us to step out of our current known and into the unknown, believing it is knowable.

Faith is trust in things we do not know in our sensory experiences but believe in our minds to be true. Faith allows us not only to imagine something but dares us to go there. Faith allows us to access unreachable places like the unreachable stars.

Think about the all the times that faith or trust has allowed you to enter a new place, a new home and put down roots in a new neighborhood, believing you will adapt and make friends. How about the times you have entered a new friendship or relationship, trusting you will be loved? Think about a time when you have taken a risk to ask the boss for a promotion or to seek a better job, to say something that is on your mind, to help someone you see in need, to try an experimental drug or a new vaccine, to trust in the knowledge of others, who have studied for many, many, years of education such as our doctors, nurses, and health care workers. These are all risks based in faith.

Some of those risks we have taken in faith have defined our lives. But nearly every step we've taken in life has involved some degree of faith. In truth, there is little we can be sure of. Think about your typical day. How much of that day can you be sure of? How sure are you that everything will go the way you imagine? Chances are, surprisingly will go the way you planned. We continuously adapt in our lives based partly on what we know and partly on faith.

When we as Christians choose to believe in the power of Jesus, when we put our trust and faith in Jesus to direct our lives or heal our brokenness, we are simply consciously acknowledging the act of allowing ourselves to step into the

realm of the unknown, trusting that Jesus is there, that His power exists, and that He will choose to use it in some way on our behalf or on the behalf of someone else. Faith allows us to risk healing and wholeness, life, and a better world. The power of faith is exemplified in our scriptures for today, as we see two inter-connected stories of Jesus' healing, one inside of the other.

The first is a miracle story of a request by Jairus, one of the local synagogue's leaders is asking Jesus to heal his daughter, who he says, is near death. We no sooner learn of the girl's plight when another story inserts itself into the story.

Jesus is followed by a large crowd. A woman suffering from hemorrhages came up behind Jesus in the crowd, reached out, and touched his robe, believing she would be made well, if only she could touch him. Immediately, she feels the change in her body. And immediately also, Jesus feels power going forth from him and knows someone touched his clothes.

As usual, the disciples are clueless. But Jesus seeks out the woman, who comes fearfully in front of him, admitting to the touch, which for a woman, especially unhealthy woman, a woman liturgically unclean, would not have been allowed. She would not have been allowed to approach and touch a man, let alone while she was ill and bleeding, something that status would have been considered ritually and unclean. She would not be allowed in the Temple to

worship. But Jesus does not scold her. Just the opposite, Jesus praises her, and He tells her faith has made her well, and He declares that she is healed. Her faith has made her well!

My brothers and sisters, faith bestows God's grace upon us in the great gift of hope. Mark shows us through these two stories that hope is the product of grace and the primary function of grace is to remove barriers; barriers that separate us from each other, barriers from God, barriers from the creation, and barriers from the loving, caring, giving, selves that God created us to be. And when grace removes these barriers, hope springs forth.

In the story of the woman with the hemorrhages, Jesus removed the Jewish barriers of an ancient taboo, in her cultural unclean isolation, and the oppressive patriarchy she has suffered, as well, not to mention the barrier of a thoughtless and callous crowd who so surrounded Jesus that she was forced to approach him on her hands and knees. Jesus removed those barriers when he allowed her to touch him and be healed and in that healing; she received new hope and a new life.

As this story concludes, Jesus continues his way to Jairus's home, while people surrounding him tell him not to bother, that the child is dead. Yet, Jesus encourages Jairus not to fear but to believe. As people surrounding the

household of Jairus continue to scoff and laugh at Jesus' determination to go in to the child, Jesus locks them outside and allows only a few disciples, along with the child's parents, to go in with him.

Then Jesus asks the little girl to rise and rise she does. It is almost as if the enormous faith of the hemorrhaging woman, whom Jesus calls daughter, has enabled the rising of this other "daughter," despite the unbelief of the synagogue folk surrounding Jairus's house.

So, my sisters and brothers, what does this tell about our faith as a church?

How can we as a church bring our faith to our intercessory prayers that are both mysterious and powerful. Prayer is very powerful. I frequently hear people asking the church for your prayers found in the pastoral concerns and petitions in the Prayers of the People and in our parish prayer list. Prayer doesn't have to be focused on a single person. Prayer can empower great healing. Think about Karen Raymond and her healing after a catastrophic car crash. Prayer can be initiated even by an unrelated person, even by someone outside of the church, perhaps especially by someone outside of the church, like 16-year-old Alex who is sick and suffering in the Boston Children's Hospital and will be in the hospital with a prognosis that will

require 6 more months to go. Remember the tiniest seed, the mustard seed, a little bit of faith can, as Jesus told his disciples, move enormous mountains.

The enormous faith in this story doesn't come from the pious Jewish men of the synagogue, nor even from Jairus himself, who makes the petition, but is easily swayed in doubt by his unbelieving friends and family. Jesus needs to shut out those voices from Jairus's head to keep him focused on the faith needed at hand. The enormous faith in this story comes from an outcast, ill woman, who "knows" that if she even just touches Jesus' clothing, she will be made well. The juxtaposition of these stories tells us something about faith that we sometimes don't want to acknowledge: it may come from unexpected people in unexpected circumstances in unexpected places that yield unexpected outcomes. The most powerful faith comes most often from those in the direst of circumstances, people who are willing to take great risks to find healing, to find acceptance, to find community, and most of all to find hope.

So, how strong exactly is our faith? We recite the creeds. We confess our faith, and yet work daily to plan our own way in the world? Or do we truly put our trust in Jesus? Do we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in our decision-making? Do we truly believe more in our own abilities than in the ability of God to change us, our church, our communities, our nation, and our world?

Mark's Gospel challenge us once again, as always. The scriptures challenge us to look at ourselves and who we confess to be. The scriptures challenge us to examine our hearts, our minds, and above all our faith. And they challenge us to be risk takers, not only in word, but indeed and in our mission, believing that Jesus still today has the power to heal and the power to resurrect.

The story is about a woman, not just cured but, healed in so many ways. It is the story of a woman restored, a woman uplifted, a woman reinvigorated, a woman resurrected, and a woman is set free. It is the story of a woman given hope when she was hopeless. In the verses leading up to these two stories that we have seen Jesus remove the barriers of debilitating illness, and now, in the story of Jairus' daughter, Jesus removed the greatest barrier of them all, death itself.

My sisters and brothers, here is our challenge for this week. We can die a thousand deaths sprinkled over a lifetime. How? By one word, "separation." This week, Mark's Gospel challenges us to examine our lives. When you reflect upon your life and in that moment of quiet reflection, you wince, and you shake your head, this is just one of those many deaths because of separation. You see, our separation from each other is occasioned by the death of our relationships. Our separation from God is marked by the death

of our faith. Our separations from the Creator and the creation is fed by the death of our ability to recognize the joy and beauty that is inherent in a beautiful world.

But death is not the final word. Throughout the gospels, Jesus Christ proved those thousands death, *even the death*, need not be a barrier for us. Even death does not need lead to hopelessness. Even death any kind of death, be it physical, emotional, moral, or spiritual need not be the ending of our lives but can, indeed, be the beginning of them. Paul says it so beautifully in chapter 8 of his letter to the Romans. “For I am convinced, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” Amen.