

Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “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.” So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. Then 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. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

“Made Well”

Last week, you granted me time away from Central to serve the larger church. I was gone from Wednesday to Sunday leading a small group at a gathering of young adults considering ministry. The Fund for Theological Education asked me to thank you for giving me the time off. We met in Austin, TX, at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary with all of the FTE’s undergraduate fellows and their fellows about to enter seminary in attendance. Over 160 young adults from over 33 denominations or traditions were represented! Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Southern Baptist, Methodist, Mennonite—it was a truly diverse ecumenical gathering!

The diversity of the group made our time together one of creativity, imagination and celebration. Morning and evening worship melded our traditions and took us places we didn’t know we could go together. Worship helped us to open our hearts to other Christian traditions.

Our diversity also created tension. Individuals struggled with the knowledge that some of their peers from other faith traditions did not accept their calling because of their

gender or sexual orientation. Father John Dear, a Jesuit and a pacifist, spoke at one of our group lectures challenging the group to follow the God of peace—forsaking all violence. Some in the group were pacifists, others believed in a just war theory. Our small groups, like the one I led, were safe spaces to build relationships that bridged the spectrum of our Christian faith creating room for discernment and risk taking. While some felt inspired by the surrounding diversity, others felt their beliefs were being intruded upon or disregarded. Many wondered how they could get along as peers and colleagues with theological tensions and differences.

In our small groups, we hoped the young adults would speak about their beliefs with Christian charity towards one another. We hoped that conversations in an intimate environment would nurture a greater understanding so they could see each other as people of faith despite all their differences.

Mark shows us that Jesus had his own way of guiding his followers to understand that those who come to him in faith from places different from their own, are not intrusions, but are beloved children of God.

Jesus had just returned from Gerasea to the west side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus' trips back and forth over the Sea of Galilee are a beautiful metaphor for his ministry. He is always crossing over to the other side! His perpetual movement and the fact that he proclaimed his message in all kinds of places, is a parable unto itself.

Today we find him returning from “the other side” of the sea from where a crowd had begged him to leave their neighborhood. When Jesus stepped out of the boat over there a man controlled by unclean spirits, “the Gerasene Demoniac”, met him. Jesus valued the wholeness of that Gerasene man over the health of a herd of nearby swine! He sent the demons into them to release the man from his pain. Filled with the torment that had plagued the man for years, the pigs ran over a cliff and fell into the sea. The Gerasenes who witnessed the redemption of the man “were afraid.” They begged Jesus to leave. The only one who responded to this miracle with faith was the healed man who begged to go with Jesus. But Jesus answered him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy God has shown you.” The man was restored to return to his community!

Now back on the other side of the sea, the Jewish side, all kinds of people come and gather around Jesus. As his sandals hit the sand the crowd parted to make way for a distressed synagogue leader named Jairus. When Jairus got to Jesus, he “fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, ‘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.’ So Jesus went with him.” Jairus the synagogue leader, powerful and educated, had given up on traditional medicine's ability to save his daughter. Yet he believed that Jesus' touch could make his daughter well.

Although the crowd let the important community leader, Jairus, right on through to Jesus not all were welcomed as he was. 12 years. It had been 12 years of pain, humiliation and isolation from society for the woman with the flow of blood. As any woman with vaginal bleeding was, she was considered unclean. No one could visit her or touch her. She had spent all her money on cures from the physicians to no avail. Her money was gone and she “was no better, but rather grew worse.” Physically weak and ritually unclean, this woman had to sneak through the crowd trying not to be noticed or they would cast her out before reaching Jesus.

The woman with the flow of blood made herself a place in the middle of the story of Jairus' daughter's healing! "The intrusion is allowed to stand because it is very, very important. The cannon of Mark, of Matthew, of Luke want us to see these stories together. Intrusions make a big difference in our lives. Intrusions often connect people that wouldn't have been connected before. The intrusion . . . connects a bleeding woman and a young woman just about to be of childbearing age."¹ They both need to be made well by Jesus. They share more in common than anyone would have thought. The unclean, impoverished woman stands on the other side of the social spectrum from Jairus, the male synagogue leader, but they come together, to Jesus, for the same reason. And Jesus commends the woman's faith, though she is deemed ritually unclean by the authorities of the day, right in front of a synagogue leader, a keeper of the rules.

Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman both sought out Jesus believing he had the power to redeem life from death. Everyone present now learns that the woman with the flow of blood was every bit as important to Jesus as the daughter of the synagogue leader. The promise of life redeemed in Jesus is for the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the prestigious and the supposed nobodies. Jesus will cross over to the other side and stop on the street for anyone.

The President of Virginia Union Theological Seminary, Rev. John Kinney, preached last Thursday evening at one of the FTE conference worship services. He spoke on last week's text where Jesus said, "Let US go over to the other side." Jesus not only crossed over to the other side, Rev. Kinney declared he took his disciples with him too! Rev. Kinney told us about growing up in segregated, all black, public school. When his second grade teacher retired and they couldn't find another black teacher, they simply put all the second and third graders together to form one large overflowing class.

Do you remember learning your times tables? Rev. Kinney's teacher was quite the disciplinarian and kept an orderly class, as you'd have to with that many students. But when it came to times tables she let the kids learn them by getting into a rhythm. 2 x 1 is two-oo; 2 x 2 is fo-ur; 2x3 is si-ix; 2 x 4 is ei-ght. They would come up to the front one by one to the beat, cruising up the aisle. Rev. Kinney was good at math and rhythm. He got to the front and his teacher pointed her stick at the chart "12 x 12 is." "One-fourty-four" he proudly responded. And he glided back to his desk to the beat.

Now Jimmy behind him was not so good with rhythm or with memorizing his times tables. He got up their and their teacher said, "4 x 4 is." "Twelve?" Jimmy responded. Rev. Kinney was howling in his seat. How could Jimmy get that one wrong? That one was so easy. He heard his teacher stop tapping her foot. Oh Jimmy is going to get it thought Rev. Kinney. He was still laughing to himself when he opened his eyes to see their teacher standing in front of him. Whap! Her stick went down on his desk. "Mr. Kinney! What is so funny?" Rev. Kinney sunk down in his desk. "I didn't hear anything to laugh about. One of your friends is lagging behind in memorizing these times tables. If he doesn't succeed, you don't succeed. You will be his tutor ever recess until the time when you can both come forward in confidence and can complete these tables." That is when Rev. Kinney realized he was not going to go to the other side, without Jimmy. Until Jimmy had the faith in himself and confidence to complete all the tables, they had to stay in at recess working together. It was a long time before Jimmy was able to say his tables! When he finally did, three people were smiling; Jimmy, Rev. Kinney and their teacher.

Jesus is always teaching his disciples that we are not going anywhere without one another. It is never ok to leave someone behind, even for another good. Jairus needed to see the woman healed and hear Jesus' words, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." She was not an intrusion on his journey of faith in Jesus. Her strength and Jesus' affirmation of her helped Jairus continue to have faith even after people came to tell him of his daughter's death. Jairus' daughter was now considered ritually unclean, like the woman with the flow of blood. But Jesus touched and healed her! Jairus began to understand that being made well is more than physical healing, it is restoration to the community and society, it is peace and wholeness found in the midst of suffering, and it is open acceptance of God's unabashed love and care for all. Jairus understood that boundaries had to be crossed for people to be made well since he had crossed one by coming to seek out Jesus.

Both Jairus and the woman with the flow of blood clung to their hope in the midst of great risk. I witnessed hope leading to risk-taking often in the conversations the young adults had at the conference as they listened respectfully and learned to discern God's presence in the midst of their diversity. Last Sunday morning, I was asked to help serve communion at our closing worship service. The President of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary was our preacher and celebrant. Two men and I were the other servers for Intinction. We were asked to help because we are all ordained and in some traditions only the ordained can serve the elements. Our hope was to make the table as open as possible to all the traditions gathered. The Rev. Dr. Ted Wardlaw celebrated the communion and then gave the instruction that any who preferred a blessing could come forward and cross their chests and would receive a blessing from one of the servers. Ted had the bread on one side and Stephen had the wine. I had the bread on the other side and Dan next to me had grape juice. There was gluten-free bread right by me too. There were abundant choices to make coming up the center aisle!

After we were situated the conference participants began to come forward. One of them came to me and crossed his chest. I reached out and made the sign of the cross on his forehead in the Triune name and gave him a blessing. Later another, and another, and another came to be blessed by me till I began to wonder if something quite amazing wasn't going on. It seemed as if all of the folks who were Catholic or Eastern Orthodox or held views on the Lord's Supper different from the Celebrant were coming to me, a woman, for a blessing. The beauty of their actions and depth of their faith stunned me. Later one of my friends who sat in the front remarked that it was more meaningful for him to watch young adult after young adult come to receive a blessing, from me, than it was to receive the sacrament himself. It felt like they chose to come to me in a sort of statement of solidarity with the larger church. Even if all aren't allowed to be ordained in our various traditions all can give, and receive, a blessing from the other.

Both Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman both engaged Jesus, an unlawful act according to all the purity standards of the Jewish people. Yet they went over to the other side disregarding rules that prevented wholeness and healing. They found that salvation or being made well was not about staying in a small safe theological or social space; it was the result of their unreasonable hope in the midst of overwhelming risk. At the point of death, a different place for each of them, they did not seek a safe place to hide, but believed that Jesus had the power to redeem life from death! And they received God's amazing peace through their bold faith. Amen.

¹ Excerpt from Barbara Lundblad's lecture at the Festival of Homiletics, May 2006.