

## IN THE QUEST FOR HEALING, WE DO WHAT WE MUST

6 Pentecost – B

July 1, 2018

Mark 5:21-43

“She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.”

I was hit by that verse, as those words hold true for too many people. They try and try to get the right care for a medical problem, and they exhaust their resources. A great many bankruptcies begin with a large medical bill. I suspect that at least one person here this morning has been through the trial-and-error path to a cure. And I also suspect that medical bills have caused unexpected stress for at least one, if not several of you.

One of my daughter’s friends tried to save up money to deal with a medical issue. The friend changed jobs, and did not get medical insurance at the new job because of existing money issues. By the time that person finally got to the doctor with the funds to pay for the procedure, the news was not good.

Some news stories this week about extreme jumps in some drug prices brought the usual head-shaking. Medical costs make it difficult for those who fall between the cracks to get the care they need. I don’t want to assign blame, as there’s plenty to go around. Let me just say that, as a nation, we need to do better for our people.

Today’s gospel presents us with something interpreters have loved to call a *Markan sandwich*: which is way of saying that we have something happening, and something else happens right in the middle of the first thing.

In this case, we had Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, whose daughter is gravely ill. Now, Jairus was a rather powerful person in his day—a person of privilege—but, one has to plead on behalf of someone he loves, he finds himself no longer a person in charge, but rather, an ordinary dad who is scared and humbled. That he comes to Jesus is a departure from convention. After all, he is used to having people come to him. So that verse in today’s gospel was another thing that struck me. A religious leader who was a person of privilege, came begging to Jesus to help him.

Jesus agrees to help, but as is often the case when we’re on a mission of some kind, there are interruptions. In this case, the crowds are pressing in on Jesus; because it seems that everyone wants something.

The woman who grabbed the hem of Jesus’ robe had to work hard to be invisible in the crowd. Because her medical need was based on a flow of blood, she was ritually unclean; therefore, not able to participate in her community. But, in her mind, just getting Jesus’ attention, or perhaps even just reaching out, almost superstitiously, to just touch Jesus’ robe, would give her a chance at healing a problem that had plagued her for twelve years, a problem for which there was apparently no human medical knowledge to heal.

Mark tells us that Jesus felt the power go out from him and asked: “Who just touched me?” I have to admire the woman’s bravery for admitting to Jesus that she was the one. Perhaps she suspected he would know, anyway. And perhaps she figured honesty was the best policy. But she approaches him humbly, expecting Jesus to chide her for her stealth approach. Jesus is quick to realize how she feels; and really, he is more interested in seeing her face-to-face and

commending her for her faith. Which he does: “Daughter, your faith has made you well.” And she was.

Meanwhile, when Jesus and Jairus continue toward his home, they are met with bad news. His daughter has died. I can only imagine the grief that seized him, the disbelief, the shock, and perhaps even some anger along the lines of Martha, and then Mary, each who said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you would have been here, my brother would not have died.” [John 11:21, 32]

The words in Mark’s gospel sound harsh: “Your daughter is dead; why trouble the teacher any further?” Even Jesus telling Jairus: “Do not fear; only believe” sounds like Jesus is raising false hope in the leader. Of course, when he got there and announced that Jairus’s daughter was “not dead, only sleeping” the crowd immediately went from the wailing of mourners to laughter at such an absurd thing to say.

Jesus goes in where the dead girl is lying. And, breaking another taboo that day, he takes her hand and says simply: “Little girl, get up.”

I am always calling my granddaughter “little girl,” so to me, this is the perfect term of endearment coming from Jesus—just as Jesus spoke to the woman who was healed of her twelve-year affliction and called her “daughter.” And those titles of endearment, of relationship, got my attention.

Each one was restored to wholeness and community. Each one given a name that signified belonging and worth. Each one a sign that God cherishes not only healing power, but loving relationships.

Such relationships lead a loving, frightened father to plead for his daughter. They propel an ostracized woman to grasp for human contact—if only by touching a robe. And at the end of it all, God’s own Son would stretch out his arms in humiliation that would, in fact, become the sign of the Father stretching himself out in love for the world he created.

Two millennia later, we find ourselves in relationship with this Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier—who first, calls us children, giving us a name of belonging; then he sends us to reach out in love, to build and nourish relationships. “Do not fear; only believe.” Trusting him we will do better for one another. We must. Amen.