**Sermon: More Than Meets the Eye**

6/27/2021

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I don’t know about you, but for me this last week has been a bit of a blur. When not caring for my children, I’ve been meeting with the SPRC and new pastor, writing a sermon, lining up greeters and a liturgist, coordinating music and our fellowship time, and trying to make this time of worship meaningful, even amidst all the differences. It’s been one of those weeks where you’re just trying to make it from one day to the next, until you can finally sit down, take a long, deep breath, and exhale.

For the disciples, that moment of peace and quiet was supposed to have been a few days earlier, when they set sail with Jesus across the Sea of Galilee. First they encountered a terrible storm that made them fear for their lives. Miraculously, as we heard in last week’s Gospel lesson, Jesus commanded the storm to be still and it was. No sooner did they land on the other side than they were approached by a man wearing shackles and yelling. The man was possessed by a legion of unclean spirits which Jesus sent into a great herd of swine feeding on the hillside above; swine that immediately rushed down the steep back and drowned themselves in the sea. Upon hearing the news, as you might imagine, the people living nearby began begging Jesus to leave. So he and the disciples got back in their boat and returned to the place where they had started. A great crowd awaited them.

Amongst the crowd that day, today’s Gospel lesson tells us, was a man named Jairus. As a leader of the synagogue, Jairus was wealthy and had access to the best medical care. But no matter what his daughter’s doctors and nurses had tried, her condition was only getting worse. She was nearing the point of death, leading Jairus to become so desperate that he pushed his way through the crowd, fell at Jesus’ feet, and begged him for a miracle. So Jesus set off with the concerned father as people followed him and pressed in on him. Included among them was a woman hoping for her own miracle after twelve years of suffering from hemorrhages. A miracle she received in an instant.

Given the size of the crowd and all that had happened over the past few days, the disciples didn’t even realize what had just occurred. But Jesus knew immediately. He knew that power had gone forth from him when someone touched his clothes, so he promptly turned to the crowd and began asking who it was. After looking around for several moments, the woman came forward afraid and trembling, fell at his feet, and told him the truth. She told him how long she had been sick, how she had spent everything he had trying to be healed, and how she come that day hoping beyond hope to be made well. “Your faith has made you well,” Jesus responded, reminding us that being made well can also mean being saved. “Go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

As the woman left, Jairus received news that his daughter had died. Suddenly, there was no more need for Jesus to accompany him. Rather than return to the crowd, however, Jesus told the grieving father to “not fear” and “only believe.” But believe in what after his greatest fear had just been realized? At once, Jesus set off with Peter, James, and John to Jairus’s house, having instructed the rest of the disciples to stay behind. The scene when they arrived reflected the heartbreak that everyone was feeling. Friends and family were weeping and wailing loudly as they tried to come to grips with the little girl’s tragic death. A death that Jesus was convinced had not yet happened. “Why do you make a commotion and weep,” Jesus asked them just after arriving, “The child is not dead but sleeping.” Now imagine you were there, that you had witnessed a doctor check the girl’s pulse and pronounce her as dead. Would you have really believed Jesus either or would you have likely laughed at him too? I’d like to think that I would not have laughed, but also doubt that I would have believed him as well.

Maybe that’s why Jesus made everyone who was laughing go outside, because they did not believe. Those who remained inside, including Jairus and his wife, went in to where the child lay. That is when Jesus walked over, took their daughter by the hand, and said to her “*Talitha cum*,” which in Hebrew means, “Little girl, get up!” To the amazement of everyone who was present, the girl immediately got up and began walking about. It was a miracle; the miracle that Jairus had been hoping and praying for when he went to see Jesus just a short time earlier. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one and to give the girl, who was twelve years old, something to eat. After all that had happened, she must have been famished.

Talk about a busy, tiring last few days: the deadly storm, a possessed man, drowned pigs, being begged to leave, sailing again, the awaiting crowd, meeting Jairus, a sick woman, and the risen girl. Even if you were one of the disciples who had not gone with Jesus to Jairus’s house, the last few days must have been quite the blur. Like me this past week, they were probably just trying to make it from one day to the next, until they could finally sit down, take a long, deep breath, and exhale. My guess is that they needed some time to regain their energy and think about everything that had just witnessed and experienced. Events filled with a lot more meaning than they probably realized at the time.

Take the healing of the sick woman and the raising of Jairus’s daughter, for example. They have a lot more in common than simply when they happened, suggesting that we need to remember more than just each miracle. Both stories include someone kneeling before Jesus. In the case of Jairus, the person kneeling was wealthy and powerful. He was the kind of man who had his local representatives on speed dial and expected to get a meeting with them that same day. His wealth and power could get him almost anything he wanted, except a healthy daughter. So he went and knelt before Jesus, begging for one of the few things that he could not do on his own. How many are like Jairus and only kneel before Jesus in our hour of greatest need? How many of us beg and plead with him when we pray? Maybe we should more often.

Then we notice a very different approach from the sick woman. Unlike Jairus, she is not the kind of person who assumes that others will clear their calendar for her. The last twelve years of her life have taught her that people like Jesus almost always have something better to do with their time. She is penniless and powerless, seemingly unworthy of his attention, so she silently approaches him from behind and touches the hem of his cloak. This woman only kneels before Jesus after being called upon to reveal herself. Some of us come to Jesus face to face, demanding his attention. Others, like the now-healed woman, come silently, trusting that he knows the words that are on our hearts.

Another similarity is that both stories include touching. With Jairus’s daughter, it is Jesus who takes her by the hand. Through his touch she is made well, just like we are made well whenever Jesus touches us. When he moves us, restores us, inspires us, forgives us, and heals us. For the woman suffering from hemorrhages, on the other hand, it is the other way round. She is the one who touches Jesus. By touching him, she moves him and makes him notice her. When we reach out to Jesus, when we touch him, he notices us and offers us healing as well. Perhaps, what matters is not the exact means by which we come into and maintain our relationship with God, but that we are in relationship with God.

A third similarity is that both stories include the number 12. While we hear that the woman had been sick for twelve years, Jairus’s daughter was twelve years old. For Jews and early Christians the number 12 was steeped in meaning. It was a shorthand way of referring to the twelve tribes of Israel, to God’s chosen people. Jesus was sent to save all of God’s children, to bring each and every one of us into a renewed, healthy relationship with God. For some of us, this gift is the result of our own desperate, faithful searching and striving. For others, our healing is a reminder of just how gracious God’s love is and how much we are loved by those around us. Jesus tells the woman that it is her faith that has made her well. We are told nothing about the faith of the girl. What we do know is that she was healed, at least in part, because of the faith and persistence of her father. What if our prayers might not only help bring about our healing, but the healing of those whom we lift to God in prayer as well?

And finally, both are healing stories. My guess is that many of these connections the disciples did not realize until later, when they finally had time to sit down, take a long, deep breath, exhale, and reflect on all that had happened over the past few days. But there was no denying that both the woman and Jairus’s daughter had been healed. Each of them had experienced a miracle, whether it was due to their faith or someone else’s, their touching Jesus or being touched by him, or Jesus being approached directly or in secret. Whenever I read the Bible, as I acknowledged in my first sermon here, I ask myself who I am in the story. My hope and prayer in that over the past two years you have felt God’s presence and healing in your lives, whether it be in those moments where you have identified with the sick woman, the dying girl, the desperate father, the weary disciples, or the caring and confident Savior. And that you will know just how much of a difference you have made in mine. A difference that I struggle to put into words and which I am only beginning to understand, having now reached the point where this journey ends and a new one begins. Here and in the coming days, may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace. And all God’s children said, amen.