

The First Reading is Second Samuel 1:1, 17-27

¹After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.

¹⁷ David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. ¹⁸ (He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said:

¹⁹ Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places!

How the mighty have fallen!

²⁰ Tell it not in Gath,

proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon;

or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice,

the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult.

²¹ You mountains of Gilboa,

let there be no dew or rain upon you,

nor bounteous fields!

For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,

the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more.

²² From the blood of the slain,

from the fat of the mighty,

the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,

nor the sword of Saul return empty.

²³ Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!

In life and in death they were not divided;

they were swifter than eagles,

they were stronger than lions.

²⁴ O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,

who clothed you with crimson, in luxury,

who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

²⁵ How the mighty have fallen

in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.

²⁶ I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;

greatly beloved were you to me;

your love to me was wonderful,

passing the love of women.

²⁷ How the mighty have fallen,

and the weapons of war perished!

Anybody in need of healing from grief this morning? Anybody in need of healing of any kind – body, mind or soul? I'm sure many of us would welcome the healing balm of God's presence in our lives, whether it's for physical healing or from deep grief or for assurance that our world gone mad is not what God intends for humanity and all of creation. The text we are about to hear from the Gospel of Mark contains the stories of two people in need of physical healing, a destitute unclean woman and a young girl clinging to life.

The Second Reading is from Mark 5:21-43:

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³ 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.” ²⁴ So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” ²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” ³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.”

³⁵ 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?” ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” ³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.

The Message – Risk Faith

Did you notice the difference between the two people who were seeking Jesus in this passage? Jairus was one of the synagogue rulers, a person of power, privilege and influence. As a matter of fact, it’s a wonder he came to Jesus himself rather than sending a servant from his household. Jairus’ temple status would have enabled him to obtain whatever he needed for himself and his daughter, well almost.

The hemorrhaging woman on the other hand had no power or privilege or influence and not even a name deemed worthy of being recorded. As a matter of fact, her ritual impurity because of her continual flow of blood would have made her an outcast for the duration of her illness... 12 incredibly long years! She would have been considered untouchable and certainly not welcomed in a crowd. No one would want to touch her for fear of being deemed unclean and in need of ritual purification. Her monetary resources were gone, being wasted on doctors that made her worse, rather than better.

So, what did Jairus and the unnamed woman, have in common? It certainly wasn't their economic or social or ecclesiastical status. What did they have in common? They both sought out Jesus and fell at his feet. They both were desperate for Christ's healing presence in and through their lives.

David was desperate for God's healing presence, too. David's grief was passionately poured out as he lamented the death of the mighty Saul and Jonathan who had fallen in battle. With their death an era in Israel's history had come to a close. We know from scripture that Saul and David had their conflicts and so did Saul and his son Jonathan, yet this lament focuses on the positive impact Saul and Jonathan had on Israel. In a time of Philistine conquest and domination, Saul led Israel back to some sense of identity and renewed freedom. Saul helped the Israelite's keep alive the hope that Israel's story had not ended. Saul brought about a time of prosperity that the daughters of Israel had not known. Yet, King Saul and the crown prince Jonathan are dead. David's grief turns personal in his lament as he grieves Jonathan whom he loved deeply, for Jonathan was a true friend. David and the people of Judah had to acknowledge and mourn these two significant losses before hope could once again rise from the depths of their despair. Only in acknowledging the depths of their loss could David and the people of Judah be open to God's healing presence in their midst. Indeed, David was desperate for God's healing presence.

Jairus, the unnamed woman and David had something in common; they knew of God's reputation, they knew of the power of God's healing presence for their lives. They knew they needed God. Yet, how often do we forget this very fact? How often do we lack faith in the healing power of God's presence for our lives?

Now I say that with a bit of caution, especially since Jesus said to the unnamed woman, "Daughter, your faith has healed you." Jesus didn't say, "My garment healed you or my power has healed you." No Jesus said, "Your faith has healed you." Or how about when Jesus said to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." Faith and belief... that is all we need in order to be healed by Jesus!

Yet, this raises a troubling question, "What happens when we are not healed?" The obvious conclusion might be... we just didn't have enough faith or really believe that we could be healed. Yet, this deduction is certainly not hopeful or helpful. It is not helpful or hopeful to anyone who has suffered from a chronic disease and prayed fervently for healing or has had a child or loved one die after fervently praying with faith and belief in God's healing presence. So, what does this mean?

I do not believe that Jesus is declaring that the woman had "enough" faith, but rather that the unnamed woman *risked faith*. She *risked action* rather than inaction. She *dared to act* on her belief in Jesus' reputation that he could make a difference in her life. She didn't succumb to all the barriers that prevented her from touching Jesus.

Her illness would have excluded her from the temple, so she couldn't get to Jesus there. Her only option was to disobey social constructs and press through a crowd to gain access to Jesus. Yet, she should have never even been in a crowd! There were rules one had to follow. Imagine all the people in the crowd who unknowingly came in contact with her as she pressed through the crowd to get close enough to touch the hem of Jesus' garment? And then when Jesus called out, "Who touched me?" Jesus' own disciples got in the way of the unnamed woman. Jesus' question was simply absurd thought the disciples given the number of people

who had pressed in and touched Jesus. Even the disciples got in the way of Jesus for the unnamed woman!

And what about Jairus? What barriers did he face to gain access to Jesus? Well, Jairus broke social constructs, too, just by going to Jesus himself instead of sending a servant. Someone of his stature falling at the feet of Jesus would have made quite a headline story for CNN Jerusalem. The crowd caused another problem, slowing down Jairus' and Jesus' progress. Then the intrusion of the unnamed woman caused a further delay, a delay that would cost Jairus' daughter her life. Men from Jairus' household got in the way... don't bother the teacher for your daughter is already dead they said. Nice churchwomen got in the way, the ones who gathered to mourn while bringing casseroles to console, as Jairus returned to his home with Jesus and Peter, James and John.

In looking at these stories there is much that got in the way of Jesus, the unnamed woman and Jairus... So, what about us? What gets in our way of accessing Jesus? What gets in the way of God's healing presence for our lives?

Here is where our American culture and social constructs get in the way or as Lois Lane said in Superman Returns, "The world doesn't need a savior and neither do I." Indeed, there are many in our culture who believe Jesus is unnecessary. Faith in Jesus is only a crutch they say, it's for those who are weak and can't figure out life on their own. Faith of any kind they say is for the feeble and superstitious. We live in a world where everything is in flux and where belief in universal truths or values are attacked. Certainly, our culture is a barrier to faith and belief in the healing presence of Jesus Christ. But there are other barriers to those who may be seeking Jesus from us as a community. It could be the way we worship that they don't understand or even our language that they don't understand. A constant challenge for gathered believers is to remove barriers that make Jesus inaccessible. We certainly don't want to be like Jesus' disciples in this story, being a hindrance rather than a conduit of Jesus' healing presence.

But what about those of us who do believe in Jesus, what gets in our way of God's healing presence for our lives? What gets in the way of God's healing presence in your life?

Do you say to God, "I can do this myself," and forget to involve God in your daily life? Or do you fear God's healing presence in your life because it means that you'll have to change? Are your barriers to Jesus more like those of Jairus or the unnamed woman? Jairus was sidetracked by others... are you? The unnamed woman was sidetracked by church rules... are you? What gets in the way of God's healing presence in your life?

As we examine our own faith journeys, I believe it's important to ask yourself, "What stands between me and God's healing presence for my life? I don't just mean physical healing? What stands in the way for you? Is it complacency or fear, pride or feelings of unworthiness, loss or hurt? What stands between you and God?"

During the terrible days of the Blitz in England, a father, holding his small son by the hand, ran from a building that had been struck by a bomb. In front of the building was a shell hole. Seeking shelter as quickly as possible, the father jumped into the hole and held up his arms for his son to follow. Terrified, yet hearing his father's voice telling him to jump, the boy replied, "I can't see you!" The father, looking up against the sky tinted red by the burning buildings, called to the silhouette of his son, "But I can see you, son. Jump!"

Can you hear God saying to us, "Jump?" Risk faith in my loving presence for your life. Risk action in seeking healing for yourself and your community. Risk jumping or leaping into the

unknown, trusting that God can see us and knows our needs.

Will we be as bold as Jairus and the unnamed woman? We will ***risk faith by taking action*** even though we might violate social constructs and ecclesiastical rules of our day? I pray we will. Amen.