

A Sermon for the  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
June 28, 2009  
Texts: Lamentations 3:22-33  
Mark 5:21-43

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“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him...”

Lamentations 3:22-25

“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.’” Mark 5:21-36

Today’s gospel serves as evidence of the quality of storyteller Mark was. Two encounters woven together, the tension of each raising the drama of the other. The particulars of each story highlighting the differences and similarities between them. For me the emotion that arises from both of these encounters and that, together, the two stories compound in each other, is desperation. We have two very different people who, at the moment of the story, share the same emotional state, they are in desperate straits.

In this portion of Mark's gospel you can really hear the oral origins of the gospel. That it began as stories told not written. You can hear the tension in the voice of the storyteller as he describes the desperation of Jairus the synagogue leader and an unnamed woman. Jesus has just arrived from across the sea and already a great crowd has come to him, when one of the leaders of the local synagogue, Jairus by name, came and fell at his feet, and begged and begged for him to come. His daughter was at the point of death, but if he would come and lay his hands on her she may be made well, and live. Please come, hurry. And so Jesus went with him.

But at the very same time, there was a woman in the crowd, unnamed by the storyteller. Anonymous because that is what her condition had made her. Unlike the prominent Jairus, a leader in the community, this woman was a non-entity, isolated, shunned. She had been suffering for twelve years with hemorrhages and her illness had cut her off from friends, from community life. She had lost everything she had paying for treatments that did not help, rather her condition grew worse. Even more isolated, she became an "untouchable," to apply a term from another culture. Separated by custom and religious law from her community and participation in the supportive activities of her religion. She was at the end of her rope, desperate. But she had heard about this new teacher, Jesus, stories about what he had done elsewhere. Now a desperate hope was sparked inside her. Too afraid to confront him directly, she thought that if she could just touch him as he walked by, she could be made well and he would never know the difference. So mingling in the great crowd that was walking with Jesus she pressed through the people until she got close and could reach out her hand. She rubbed his cloak. Immediately, she could feel that her hemorrhaging had stopped, that her body was healed of the disease. A momentary joy flashed through her mind. But suddenly he stopped. Jesus wheeled about in a circle demanding to know who had touched him. In the midst of all the jostling and bumping he had felt a touch that was different, that something had happened in him. He scanned the crowd. The momentary joy she felt was washed away by the return of fear. Knowing what had happened to her she felt she could not hide herself, even in the crowd. Trembling, she approached and fell down at his feet, and told him everything. He said to her, "Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague." Jesus' blessing of her desperate faith completes her salvation, her return to wholeness in every way, physically, spiritually, socially.

Now, while all of this was going on, one can only imagine the mounting desperation in the mind of Jairus, as this desperate dash to save his daughter is interrupted and delayed. But that's part of Mark's message. Jesus' love and compassion is available to everybody, leader or outcast, pillar or untouchable. Those who come near in faith will be touched by Jesus' love. But now desperation is about to be turned into anguish. People arrive from Jairus' house to tell him it's too late, his daughter has died, no use bothering the teacher any longer. Hearing this news, Jesus turns to Jairus, and in what Barbara Brown Taylor calls Jesus' shortest sermon on record, says, "Do not fear, just believe." Five words that probably capture the fundamental message of the last two chapters of Mark's gospel, from the stilling of the storm, to the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, the unnamed woman, and Jairus' daughter -- "Do not fear, have faith."

He tells Jairus let's go, and bringing his three closest disciples, Peter, James and John, they all rush to Jairus' house. Outside is a crowd of mourners weeping and wailing. As they make their way through the crowd he tells them not to weep, death is not the end, death is not the

last word. They laugh at him. Jesus goes in to the girl's room, takes her by the hand and says, "Little one, time to get up." And immediately she got up and began to walk about. Everyone who witnessed it were overcome with amazement. Jesus made them swear not tell anyone what happened. Fat chance! Never once was Jesus successful in keeping that from happening.

For the tongues of the desperately faithful who have experienced Jesus' love and healing cannot be stopped. To paraphrase our closing hymn today, it's like they have found "a thousand tongues to sing their great Redeemer's praise." The word about Jesus and the blessing he brings spread far and wide, such that he couldn't go about in public for the great crowds that came seeking him and pressing close to him.

Responding to these stories of the desperate seeking Jesus, one writer asked, "Where are these desperate seekers today? Where are those driven to get close to Jesus and not let anything stand in their way? I haven't noticed them pushing their way into our churches lately. Has everyone who wants to find Jesus already found him?" Her personal feelings were that churches had become too bland. That they have corralled Jesus and tamed him and thus, in some sense, gained control over him. But that it's not a tame Jesus people are yearning for, but rather "a genuine undomesticated Savior, the One who loves fiercely and speaks sharply, who looks us in the eye and speaks to us of God's uncompromising love, who startles us with more forgiveness than we think we deserve, who challenges us to extend the same to others. They want the Jesus who commands us to love our enemies, serve the poor, and see ourselves in the stranger." The Jesus who is available to anyone who in desperation, after trying everything else, draws close to him, brushes against him, and feels something inside them begin to heal, feels love reawakening in them when they thought it was gone forever.

I believe *that* Jesus is here. The One who is the hope of the desperate, the courage of the fearful, the comforter of the grieving, the welcomer of the lost and outcast. He is here! How do we let the world know that he's here? Amen.