

Holy God, may only your Word be spoken; only your Word heard.+. *Amen.*

We return this morning to the second half of Our Lord's Very Busy Day – the same day that we studied last week. It has become afternoon, and Jesus has by now taught the four parables. He has stilled the storm on his way by boat to heal the Gerasene Demoniac, and now after traveling to the other side again, he performs the final two miracles of this day: the healing of the hemorrhagic woman, and the resurrection of the little girl. These two miracles are the subject of our Gospel lesson today, and there is much to think about.

Our Gospel accounts always contain important details. Have you ever noticed the way in which Jesus never wastes an opportunity to teach us? Every action and nonaction, word and symbol are significant. For example, aren't you curious about the number twelve being used twice? We have a woman at the end of her reproductive life, hemorrhaging for twelve years. And we have a young woman of twelve years of age, just on the brink of her own reproductive life – resurrected from death. Known as the resurrection of Jairus' little girl, she was in fact not a little girl, but a young woman, now of marriageable age in her culture. Some scholars point to the significance of the number twelve being used within the context of reproductive capacity as representing the preservation and propagation of the Twelve Tribes, and the renewal of Israel. No detail is insignificant, and I love that.

Now, consider this hemorrhaging woman: suffering in mind, body and spirit, she is now destitute - we can all relate to medical bills landing us in the poorhouse, with no relief to show for it. She is lonely because she has been ostracized by her people for twelve years for being ritually unclean; unable to attend worship in community, or to make her required religious sacrifices for the same reason, for twelve years!! (Imagine being a person of deep faith, and being blocked from entering your house of worship for that long!) This woman was just thoroughly beaten down. Still, even in her diminished state, she had qualities that I am very struck by. Perseverance, for one: even in her exhaustion, she forced herself forward through the crowd, sure of her hope. Honesty, and humility: she could have just vanished into the crowd, healed and strong, but she came forward to confess what she had done. She was a woman of courage: when he demanded to know who had touched his clothes: "...*in fear and trembling, she fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.*" And, most of all, she was a woman of deep and absolute faith. She had no doubt that she would be made well by simply touching Jesus' robes. *He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."*

Now this is fascinating to me. Jesus tells her that it is not his power that has healed her, even though it was his power, or energy, that he sensed had gone forth from him at her touch. Jesus says this to us several times in the Gospels: "*Your faith has made you well.*" Not his power, not even the power of God through him, but our faith in him. This feels to me like one of those concepts that looks very simple on the surface, but has really radical implications: that *our faith* in God can bring miraculous change. It is one of those phrases that we've heard all our lives, that has become practically "background noise to Christians, but I hear it differently today.

Think about this. We know that *God* makes miraculous changes: we see God's hand moving in the world every day. And we know that Jesus worked absolute miracles: with people like the hemorrhaging woman who was *actively* faithful, as well as with people who were not able to engage their faith at all: the resurrection of Jairus' daughter, for example. She was dead,

and was resurrected at his words, "*Talitha, cum.*" "*Little girl, get up!*" Clearly some miracles, like this one, were his doing, and then there were others which were somehow a *reflection* of the healed persons' faith. We as Episcopalians believe that our Lord Jesus emptied himself willingly of his divinity at incarnation, in order to be completely and fully human; we believe that he retained no benefit of his divinity during his time as man, so that his suffering would be in complete resonance with the suffering of the whole world.

Some theologians hold that Jesus, *as* fully human, did not actually have any healing power himself. But, being the one fully *perfect* human, *his belief was perfect* in God's power, and this made him the purest, clearest channel for God's healing power to flow through, effecting absolute miracles. This is a new concept for me, one that I am wrestling with, given that I have thought of Jesus all my life as being the one who made miracles happen. But this is a possibility that I am thinking deeply about. Jesus said, "***Do not fear, only believe.***" I think this is one of the most radical statements I can think of, if we hear it with new ears. "***Do not fear, only believe.***" It may take us an entire lifetime to get to the point where we do not fear, that we only believe, but if we can get even close, I think it could actually change everything.

I visited with a beloved elder the other day who is facing the end of her life. I found myself just in awe of her peacefulness, and her good cheer, when she talked about the simple reality that she is looking square ahead at her own End Of Days. She is a woman of such faith and trust in God that she truly has no fear about death, and I found it quietly stunning. During the sharing of Holy Communion together, we said the words of the 23rd Psalm, and afterwards she recounted the words of an old friend of hers, a Jewish scholar who in the past had given her such comfort in pointing out something in the phrase, "Yea, though I walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death." She said, "he reminded me that that little word *through* is so important. It reminds us that we go *through* death, that death is not the end." This faithful woman's lack of fear, and her level of belief, are powerful examples of what Jesus wants for all of us.

Our hemorrhaging woman had to push through that big crowd to get close to Jesus. What is it in your life that you are having to push through to feel closer to him? Is it the seduction of our busy schedules, fooling us into thinking that other things should come first before acknowledging him in thought and prayer? Instead of taking those free minutes to check a few more emails, couldn't we take those minutes to breathe and sit in quiet gratitude for his beauty and presence with us? Our hemorrhagic woman considered herself to be terribly unclean and unworthy, and suffered a deep sense of separation from God. Is there something that makes you feel "ritually unclean"? Something that is blocking you from humbly approaching the Holy of Holies, the God who knew you before you were made? In the Jewish tradition, both in ancient times and still in present times, the ritual purification bath of the *mikvah* was practiced to purify those who had become ritually unclean. In our tradition, we are cleansed by the waters of baptism, once for all our lives, and we renew our baptismal vows regularly. I'm reminded of a story I once heard about The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who would finish his morning shave by rinsing his face three final times in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We all can have daily rituals that help us remember who we are, and Whose we are, keeping us close to the Lord who loves us.

We as Christians are washed clean in the waters of baptism, and we are washed anew with our tears of contrition and grief and gratitude, and that is a beautiful thing. We are forgiven

of our sins by the mercy of our Lord's gift of himself on the cross, and that is a beautiful thing beyond all measure. And yet still there are times when we need our own rituals like confession and absolution, prayer, and anointing, to remind us of our Lord's mercy, and that is a beautiful thing. Whatever you feel you're ready to do, whether it is to add a new daily or weekly or monthly rhythm to your life in relationship with Christ, I strongly support you in pushing through the blocks and distractions of the world to get closer to the One who loves us and waits for us, no matter how far we might think we've wandered.

Amen.

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June 26, 2009