

Year B, Proper 8
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Consider reading today's Gospel through the prism of boundaries, as in boundary line, property line, or even a divide. A divide is something that separates realms. Think of the Continental Divide, that north/south mountainous divide that dictates precipitation flow to the watersheds of the eastern and western portions of North America. More locally the Mississippi River divides east and west banks. On their own, divides are neutral. Divides become energized by the weight that we apply to them. They reflect our values; they reflect us.

In our reading this morning Jesus has crossed a different sort of divide, the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel. It is also known by the names of Lake Genessaret and the Sea of Tiberius. The large inland lake is thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. It forms the headwaters of the Jordan River, another north/south divide separating the east and west banks so often heard in the news. The living waters of Galilee make their way through the Jordan and into the Dead Sea. You may recollect that last week's reading centered on the healing of the Gerasene demoniac. This territory lies to east of the Sea of Galilee and the territory of Galilee lies roughly to the west.

Upon his return to Galilee Jesus encounters Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, whose daughter is near death. As we know, Jesus is delayed by his encounter with the hemorrhaging woman, but eventually he makes his way to the house. It is here that we learn the girl has seemingly crossed the divide from life to death. Despite the unbelief and outright ridicule of the mourners, Jesus is able to bring her back, to life.

Sandwiched between the plea of Jairus and the healing of his daughter is Jesus' encounter with the hemorrhaging woman, which forms its own curious divide. According to the purity code of Leviticus 15:25-30, she would have been "unclean" on the other side of a ritual divide that separated the "in" from the "out" the clean from the unclean.¹ That Jesus crosses the divide of clean and unclean is not exactly news to us who have heard the many stories of Jesus interaction with humanity on the outside. What's fascinating about this story is who initiates the crossing of the divide- the hemorrhaging woman! "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well" (Mark 5:28). And it comes to pass, "Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease" (Mark 5:29). Jesus senses the power that leaves him, but notice he doesn't chide her but instead praises her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (Mark 5:34).

Every time we initiate a disciple into the faith, the church as a body and we individually are offered the privilege to renew our commitment to the Christian way of life. After we restate our allegiance to the undivided Trinity as expressed in the Apostles' Creed (BCP, p. 305) we are then offered five questions which help us to apply this faith to our daily Christian walk.

“Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

“Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?”

“Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?”

“Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?”

“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”

Wrestling with these questions will help you deepen your personal faith, but beyond that there is a still greater benefit; our country will be better from your Christian striving. As we look forward to celebrating the 242 birthday of our beloved nation, we find ourselves a divided people. So many of the arguments and counter-arguments are pleas for Republicans to convince or vanquish Democrats or Democrats to convince or vanquish Republicans and the poor Independents find themselves shot at from both sides (violent imagery used intentionally). It doesn’t seem to be working and the divide only seems to move us deeper and further apart.

If you consider that our nation can also be understand from the vantage point of Family Systems Theory, we recognize the futility of trying to change a system through manipulation of other. Although we have no power over others, we do have power in the same way the hemorrhaging woman had power to reach across the divide to Jesus. What I mean is this, we cannot change other people, but it is within our own power to reach out to Jesus, and when we do, the system will change. If you want to change the way Americans interact with one another, try to be a better Christian. America will be better off if we make good on our Baptismal Covenant with God.

ⁱ The New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV, Oxford University Press, 1989. New Testament, page 66.