

Sermon for June 28, 2009

“In God’s Own Time”

Mark 5: 21-43

“I know you are busy” someone said to me the other day, “Can I talk with you a minute? I won’t take much of your time, I promise.”

We’re all busy—at something, aren’t we? Time is important to all of us. In reality, however, my time is not any more important than your time. What’s important is how we are using the time that we have.

Sometimes the most important things that can happen to us in life are the unexpected intrusions. You have to be somewhere—you have a time frame you are working with—you have a clear agenda that you have carefully put together...and then, you get distracted. Something else comes up—a visit—a phone call that you were not expecting—an emergency that needs your immediate attention. The “something else” turns out to be more important than your original plans were to begin with.

Our Gospel lesson today is a story about a woman who was an intrusion in Jesus’ plans. It is also a lesson in taking time for something that you were not expecting.

One of the leaders of the Synagogue named Jairus, approaches Jesus and begs him repeatedly to come and heal his daughter, who is near death. Jesus agrees. But on his way, Jesus is distracted by a woman who reaches out from the crowd and touches his robe.

Like Jesus, we don’t know who this woman is, we don’t know her name, we know nothing of her family circumstances...we only know that she is ill and has been hemorrhaging for 12 years. She has endured much over those years and had been under the care of many physicians. She had exhausted her resources in search for a cure, only to become worse. In her day, she was also considered to be unclean, and was shunned to the margins of life. She had been poked at, tested, discussed, humiliated, stripped of her dignity and rejected by society. She had no hope left...except maybe what Jesus could offer.

She said to herself, “If only I can touch the hem of his garment, I will be well.” In doing so, she not only stepped out on faith—she stepped out from the crowd where her illness, her poverty, her pain, and her gender had pushed her. As long as she was unclean she was told by the religious authorities that she was unfit to worship God.

The Bible tells us, however, that she had heard of Jesus and that she took it upon herself to touch his robe so that she could be healed. It was a bold act. What would people say? What would they do to her if they saw her touch the Holy Rabbi? He might even rebuke her. The crowd might stone her. It was a desperate act of faith by a desperate woman.

It was, however, the right time—because it was God’s time.

When she touched his robe, Mark tells us that “immediately” she was healed. Mark also tells us “immediately” Jesus felt the power of healing go out of him.

Jesus then asks, “Who touched my clothes?” The Disciples certainly didn’t know, “Look at the crowd,” they say, “It could have been anyone.” But Jesus insists; he wanted to know who the person was so he could speak to her. Finding her, Jesus tenderly lifts the woman by her hands, and tells her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

The whole episode was an intrusion to Jesus’ original plans -- to heal Jairus’ daughter...but this story now challenges us to view the whole concept of healing in a different way.

By looking for and spending unscheduled time searching for this woman, Jesus teaches us that he not only could bring physical healing to those in need, he also brought them a restored relationship with God.

For this reason, he needed to stop and search for this person of enormous faith who reached out to him. He needed to embrace her, to know her, to spend some time with her, and to claim her as a child of God. He needed to let her know she was forgiven and loved and now had a new life.

As a result of this story, the Christian faith has always had a deeper understanding of healing, which goes beyond restoration to physical health. The central image of healing for the Christian is not cure, but care; not wellness but wholeness—and wholeness means being able to live a meaningful life, in relationship to God and with those who care for us. It means being valued for who we are.

By now, Jairus’ friends had arrived with the news that his daughter had died. One can only imagine how Jairus felt about Jesus wasting his time on some unclean woman when he could have saved his daughter instead.

But before Jairus could put his rage into words, Jesus reached out to him and said, “Do not fear, only believe.” Arriving, Jesus took the girl’s hand and said, “Little girl, get up!” And she stood up and began to walk and they were all amazed.

In God’s own time, life was restored to a scorned woman and a dead child.

In God’s own time, the world came together and Jesus was sent into that world to save all who would hear his voice—the healthy, the wealthy, the poor, the weak, the outcast, the lost—the dead.

Life on this earth will come to an end—we know that: “For everything there is a season, a time to be born, and a time to die...” (Ecc. 3:1)

There came a “time” for those we have loved and have said goodbye to—and there will come a time for all of us. From my own personal experience, my time and God’s time would not have been the same. I can already attest to that. But I’m personally glad that it all rests in God’s hands. For it is in God’s own time that all will be made well and perfect.

In reality, the ultimate healing that Christ has to offer us is not always physical but spiritual; not always relief from disease, but the knowledge that we are loved; not always a longer life here on earth, but something much better—eternity in the kingdom of God.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Rev. Dr. Joe M. Wilson
Ladue Chapel PC
06-28-09