

Sermon, Proper 8, Year B, June 27, 2021, Jane A. Beebe

‘He took her by the hand and said to her, “...Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.’ (Mark 5:41-43)

In today’s Gospel we have two interwoven stories of Jesus’ healing miracles. Between last week’s story of the calming of the storm and today, Jesus has also dramatically healed the Gerasene demoniac by sending the demons into a herd of two thousand pigs. We hear that Jesus crosses the water once again by boat. The crowds following Jesus at this point have grown so much in size they are described as “pressing in” on Jesus. This seems to convey an intense longing in those that surround Jesus simply to be near him. Into this scene enters Jairus.

Jairus is described as being one of the leaders of the synagogue. He would have been a person of importance and high social standing. Yet Jairus seems to abandon all personal dignity. He prostrates himself at Jesus’ feet, and begs repeatedly that Jesus come and lay hands on his sick daughter. We can imagine all the anguish of a parent at the end of his rope. At this point Jesus seems to waste no time in conversation with the man. The text says simply: “So he turned and went with him.” The crowd follows. Then the story takes a turn.

A woman comes up behind Jesus and touches his cloak. She appears to be hoping that the milling crowd will mask what she has done. It is poignant to me that not only does she come up behind Jesus, she does not call out to him, or

attempt to meet him face to face. There have been times in my life when I felt I could only approach Jesus this way. Perhaps you, too, can empathize with her. Her need is also desperate. Not only has she suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years, she has “endured much” under treatment by many physicians, and has spent all that she has to no avail. She is getting worse, not better. Still, she has hope that if she can just get close enough to touch Jesus’ cloak, she will become well. (This same story appears in Matthew 9. In that version it says the woman touches the fringe of his garment. This could mean that she touches Jesus’ prayer shawl. I’ve always liked that idea).

When she touches his cloak, she can feel in her body that she has been healed from her disease. Then we have one of Mark’s famous “immediatlys.” The hemorrhaging stops. Jesus, too, feels that power has gone out of him. He looks all around to see who it may have been. He asks, “Who touched my clothes?” Approaching Jesus fearfully, the woman falls down before him, and tells him the whole truth of her healing. Then Jesus says these beautiful words, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed from your disease.” (Mark 5:34)

The healing happened in an instant with no exchange of words. Was that not enough? Jesus is ostensibly on an urgent journey to attend to a dying child. Why does Jesus choose to take the time to find out who it was that had touched him?

This woman's healing was in itself a miracle. Yet Jesus seems to want more for her. He addresses her as "Daughter." One can only imagine the distress and social isolation her condition has brought this woman. Jesus gives her a lovely familial relationship with him. He tells her to go in peace. Jesus wants healing not just for her physical ailment, but for all the trauma of what she has endured over twelve years. And he affirms her faith. She can take that with her as well.

With this apparent interruption, it appears to be too late for Jairus' daughter. She has already died. Persons from Jairus' household come to bring the bad news. They tell Jairus, "Why trouble the teacher any further." One can imagine grief and bitterness in their words. Jesus reassures Jairus, saying, "Do not fear, only believe." Even as these words may have been hard for Jairus to swallow, this is Jesus saying, "Fear not." Surely the love and compassion of those words reached Jairus on some level. Taking along his most trusted disciples Jesus tells the mourners at the house that the child is not dead but sleeping. They laugh—probably derisively.

I love that Jesus takes the parents with him when going in to where the child is lying. Jesus takes the girl by the hand and tells her to get up. It is as if she is to be awakened from a child's afternoon nap, ready for more activities and time with her family. Jesus tells them to give her something to eat. This is such a wonderful, small detail. One of the times Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection,

he asks, “Have you anything here to eat?” In modern times I can imagine Jesus coming into the kitchen and leaning on the refrigerator door. He is demonstrating to his disciples that he is fully alive; he is no apparition. This child is twelve, not yet a young woman. Still, she is on the threshold of what her parents can now hope will be a normal life. She is fully alive.

When I was released from debt with the help from a 12-step program, and restored to life, that seemed miraculous enough. And yet I had no idea of all that would be restored to me. I know I have said that it became easier to pray. Without the burden of constant anxiety, worry, and shame, I could open my heart to God without fear. I could simply breathe. I could take a breath in without hitching. Cliché though it may be, I learned that it is possible “to let go, and to let God.” It took several years to actually pay off what I owed—yet that was by the way: simply a cleanup process, a way of making amends.

Along the way, I learned again what it is to have peace. It is not the kind of peace that erases all that is difficult in human life. It is the kind of peace that allows me to know in my innermost being that I am not alone in facing those difficulties. It is the kind of peace that allows me to take pleasure in daily tasks, and to pay attention to what is happening around me.

One of the things I did in order to save money was to bake my own bread. In recent years I have gotten away from baking on a regular basis. I did take it up

again during the pandemic. I had forgotten how wonderfully therapeutic the whole process is. There are no guarantees with bread baking. It is affected by the weather and barometric pressure, by the condition of the yeast and flour, and maybe even my mood. While I have explored no-knead recipes (and they are great), there is something about actually kneading the bread that nourishes my soul—even before I actually bake and eat it!

As long as I remembered to begin early on my day off, I would usually end up with something more than worth eating—and something I could share as well. And there is nothing like the scent of baking bread. I had enjoyed learning how to bake bread as a teenager. I had no idea such a homely task could bring me healing. An activity begun in frugality became a way of enjoying a more abundant life, a life better than I could have imagined. I learned I could make something wonderful—or at least edible—from simple ingredients. All it took was some labor, time, and patience. Now I understand in a visceral way why Jesus used bread, wine, and fish to show his disciples what he was offering the world. It is life itself: renewed constantly, always resurrecting.