

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Mark 5:21-43

The gospel text this week brings us face to face with two individuals, the woman who bled, and Jairus, father of a dying child. Both are desperate and both are full of faith and expectation that Jesus could and would “fix things.” These are miracle stories, and Jesus did fix things. But if we read them just as stories meant to convince us that Jesus could do incredible things, it takes us down a path of thinking about Jesus as a genie in a bottle. It leads us to believe that Jesus was sent into the world to grant our wishes. And there are evangelists who raise a lot of money promising that this is true. If you just do this, or live a certain way, or do certain things, life will be good and fair and always make sense. It’s a belief system that will take you down a path filled not just with potholes, but land mines!

Jesus did not come to grant our wishes. Jesus came to confront us and to teach us to seek and find the Kingdom of God. Through Jairus and the woman, that’s what Jesus is doing here. The heart of this story is not that Jesus was capable of amazing acts of healing. The critical lesson of the story is understanding how the woman and Jairus’ daughter were healed.

Jesus says to the woman who touched his cloak, your faith has made you well.” To Jairus he says, Do not fear, only believe.” Clearly, faith is essential in these and all the miracle stories of Mark. But where we get off track is when we believe that faith is something that can be conjured from within, pulled up and put to use by sheer willpower, like The Force in Star Wars, or a magical spell from Harry Potter.

That’s not to say we can’t look inside and find the faith we have cultivated and stored there. That’s the whole idea. But we can’t pull it out of nothing. I love this explanation of the kind of faith Jesus is talking about. It’s from an author by the name of Graeme Goldsworthy. He says Biblical faith is the kind of faith you need to drive across a rickety-looking bridge. You don’t pull up to the bridge, pause and think, “Do I have enough faith to drive across this bridge?” That’s the wrong question. The real question is, “Can this bridge handle the load?” Once you believe that the bridge will hold your vehicle, faith in a safe crossing is the byproduct.

Jairus and the woman believed Jesus could and would help them. Their faith made it possible. The woman believed, because of what she had seen and heard about Jesus. Perhaps she had seen him before and heard him speak. Whatever she had done, it was the equivalent of understanding the structural integrity of that bridge. She believed in him and from there came her faith. She didn’t

even think it was necessary for Jesus to see her. She didn't want to draw attention, but only touch his cloak. We know touch is a powerful thing, we have missed it so much in the last 16 months! But this woman's touch was unique. Lots of people were jostling Jesus. The disciples knew that brushing up against him was not enough to release his power to heal. Her touch was distinctive in that crowd. Her touch was a conduit of her faith in total surrender to Jesus.

All that is to say that we need to look outward to do the work of cultivating our faith. It's why we talk about disciplines of spiritual practice, meditation, Lectio Divina, the study of scripture, prayer, worship, service to others. That outward look also means being awake to all the ways God is alive and well and working in our lives. We spend so much time on autopilot the miracles of God's endless mercy pass by unnoticed. We too often become engrossed in all the tragedy, and hate, and heartbreak in the world, and forget to say thanks or even recognize the love of God at work all around us.

The woman who bled and Jairus did not suddenly decide to go to Jesus because they looked outside and saw a bunch of people following an itinerant healer down the street. Something they had heard, or learned, or experienced, convinced them that they could, and should, humble themselves before this man.

Jairus had to give up all concern about how it might look for him, a community leader, to fall at the feet of Jesus. He had to set aside needing to know exactly how Jesus might help his daughter. He had to admit he was powerless. He had to surrender.

The bleeding woman does the same thing. She approaches Jesus quietly, not wanting even to be noticed, not even feeling worthy of notice, but trusting that Jesus had the power to heal her. And when she is healed and Jesus calls her forth, she "falls down before him in fear and trembling."

That place of humility did not come easily for either of the characters in our story today, they were both suffering and both came in desperation. But the key thing is that they both came in a posture of submission to the power and authority of Jesus. There were no parameters around their cries for help.

What we can learn from this story is that entering the Kingdom of God requires humility. It requires surrendering any notion that we know what we need, that we know what should happen, that we are in control.

Richard Rohr says it this way.

Surrendering to the divine Flow is not about giving up, giving in, capitulating, becoming a puppet, being naïve, being irresponsible, or stopping all planning and thinking. Surrender is about a peaceful inner opening that keeps the conduit of living water flowing. It is a quiet

willingness to trust that you really are a beloved son or a beloved daughter, which allows God to be your Father and Mother. It really is that simple, which for the human ego is very hard.

Faith and trust in God's promise, "I am who I am," doesn't come just from reading the story of Moses and the burning bush. Faith that God will always be who God is comes from our relationship with God. It comes from work to understand how God functions and does not function in the world. It comes from giving up the illusion that we are in control and humbling ourselves to ask for help from the depths of our truest selves.

Deep, reliable, durable faith in God requires humility. And it's all summed up in the simple words we will pray as we gather around God's table this morning. "Thy will be done."