

**The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd**

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Proper 8; Mark 5:21-43

The news cycles these days are just so fast. I feel like I cannot even remember major events that happened only weeks ago. It's been a while since I preached last, so I combed my memory and the internet to recall what's been going on in our country's news over the past month. I was astounded to realize the sheer volume of major events and crises that have occurred.

Celebrity suicides, the North Korean summit, flooding in the District and new worries about global warming, trade war threats, and increased international tensions. And, just this week was the public feud over civility with the shaming and shunning of public officials, the Supreme Court upholding the Administration's Travel Ban, and the mass shooting at the news room of the Annapolis Capital Gazette.

And, of course, there was also the crisis at our southern border with the administration's zero tolerance immigration policy which resulted in the separation of thousands of children from their parents. This has been an extended tragedy as the crisis moved from the actual separations, to the current crisis of how to reunite children who have been dispersed throughout our country with parents, some of whom have already been deported.

The heart-breaking images were everywhere of crying and distraught preschoolers watching as their mothers are arrested and taken from them; young children surrounded by chain-link fencing and watched over by adults in uniform; and row upon row of elementary-aged boys sleeping on floor mats with foil blankets.

Reviewing these news items from just this past month, I felt overwhelmed and began to despair. I began to wonder if we will ever experience the promises of love, communion, and peace. How long, I ask God. How long until your kingdom comes? How long until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream? Sometimes it feels as if we are forever lost to rancor, fear, division, and injustice.

When I am in a mood such as this, I often find solace in the Psalms. For me, the beauty of the psalms is that they so richly give voice to the fullness of the human condition. There, I find expressed the human experience of the journey from longing, suffering, and despair to hope, joy, and the faith in the goodness and justice of God. It is there that I am reminded of God's continual promise of the grace of forgiveness and reconciliation.

One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 85, and especially these verses:

- 7 Show us your mercy, O LORD, \*  
and grant us your salvation.
- 8 I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, \*  
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people  
and to those who turn their hearts to him.
- 9 Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, \*  
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Mercy and truth have met together; \*  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

This is the promise for which my heart yearns... “that [God’s] glory may dwell in our land” and “mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” What more poetic and beautiful image of perfect reconciliation and restoration to wholeness? This is a promise that stirs and awakens faith!

According to our prayer book, the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. Our mission is, first and foremost, a mission of reconciliation. Being a faithful follower of Jesus, means continuing his holy work of reconciliation and healing in the world – restoring to unity all of God’s creation, to each other, and to God. This is no small task, and I think history shows us that it is not something we can do alone. We need each other – the Church – and we need God’s redeeming and life-giving grace that transforms our hearts and renews the world.

Today, our gospel lesson is composed of two stories of healing – one nested within the other. We begin with Jesus back on land and back at his ministry of healing, and he surrounded by on all sides from folks who are hopeful that Jesus can help them. In the midst of this crowd, Jairus pushes his way through and falls at Jesus’ feet, begging Jesus to come to his home and heal his dying daughter. As a synagogue leader, he would have been a powerful enough figure to summon whomever to come to him, but on this day, he was fearful and desperate enough to seek Jesus out himself.

In compassion, Jesus agrees to go with Jairus. But along the way, he is interrupted. A woman who has been hemorrhaging for 12 years is also desperate enough to thread her way through the crowd to Jesus. Because of the flow of blood, this unnamed woman would have been considered ritually unclean, making her a social outcast, for anyone who came in contact with her would also be unclean. In her condition, she would have been relegated to the fringes of society, segregated from her family and community. She took a big risk by defying the rules and entering into the crowd.

But she does so because she sees Jesus as her only salvation. Thinking, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well,” the woman reaches out as Jesus passes by. Even this merest touch heals her instantly and she is restored to wholeness. Jesus, aware that healing power had been drawn from him, he asks who had touched him. The woman “in fear and trembling” came forward and fell down before him and confessed. In love, Jesus calls her “daughter” and says that her faith has made her well.

Mark then picks back up the storyline of Jairus and his daughter. In Jesus’ presence, Jairus is informed that his daughter had just died and that Jesus might as well resume his previous plans. Instead, Jesus tells Jairus, “Do not fear, only believe,” and they continue on. Upon entering the house, Jesus approaches the girl, takes her by the hand, and speaks to her, “Little girl, get up!” Immediately, the once-dead girl rises and walks around.

For Mark, the theological significance of these stories is how they demonstrate and affirm Jesus as messiah and the true king of Israel. What seem to be magical miracles are, in actuality, deeds of power demonstrating that the spirit and authority of God moves within him. For Mark, Jesus is, indeed, the Lord of creation and his kingship embodies reconciliation and healing – a restoration to wholeness. And these stories make plain that it is faith that is the conduit facilitating this healing.

In the very next scene in Mark’s gospel, Jesus returns to Nazareth and goes to the synagogue to teach. But the people think they know who Jesus is and are skeptical of him. Because of their lack of faith, Jesus could not heal most of them and he “was amazed at their

unbelief.”

These two nested stories show us that faith that is necessary for our healing. They are stories that demonstrate God’s power working through Jesus – that God’s healing and salvation is always present and what is required is not status, money, ritual purity, or specific acts, but faith. Faith alone has the strength to overcome the bondage of sin, fear, and suffering. Faith alone is the conduit for our spiritual salvation and healing. And when we are healed on the inside – when we live in the grace of the kingdom of God – when we live in Christ – we “go in peace”, irrespective of our circumstances. That is where true salvation may be found.

The problem, of course, is that even when we have the faith that could move mountains, we are not always healed...at least not in ways we expect. We all know of great Christians who were faithful in prayer and hopeful that God would cure them of some ailment, but who were not cured after all. As the saying goes, God always responds to our prayers, but just not always in the ways we want. But one’s faith does, indeed, offer salvation and restoration to spiritual wholeness, and with this, liberation from the bondage of fear and death. When we faithfully open ourselves to Christ’s healing grace, we open ourselves to the transformation of our hearts and the healing of our souls.

Jesus calls out not only to Jairus’ daughter, but to each and every one of us, “Get up, all of you, my beloved!” and we, too, are roused from our deathly slumbers. In Christ, we, too, are restored to wholeness and reconciled to unity with each other. In Christ, we, too, are given new and sustaining life. As Fredrick Buechner writes, “the power that is in [Jesus] is the power to give life not just to the dead like the child, but to those who are only partly alive, which is to say to people like you and me who much of the time live with our lives closed to the wild beauty and miracle of things, including the wild beauty and miracle of every day we live and even of ourselves.”

It is that power that is at the heart of these stories – the power given to us when Jesus rouses us from our sleep and invites us to wake up and live lives of significance. It is that power of new life, new hope, and new being that can be our salvation. And it is only that power that can heal our pain, save our souls, and bring us into the kingdom of heaven, that heavenly country where God’s perfect love is mirrored fully in the hearts of all people and “righteousness and peace have kissed each other”.

Amen.