

IN DESPERATE NEED

A Message by the Rev. Joyce L. J. Lawson

Mark 5:21-43

August 12, 2018

This morning we come face to face with a desperate father, and we quickly discover why – his daughter is very sick and near death. He has no phone; he has no car; and even if he did there is no local hospital to which he could take his daughter. But that father receives word of a traveling wonder worker who happens to be nearby and who might just have a miraculous cure to save his daughter. The father heads out to search for traveling physician. He is not exactly sure where to find him, but between local gossip and the crowd of people gathered around the physician the father locates him. The father is someone of importance in the community, he is a leader at the local synagogue, but in those moments as he approaches the physician, he is merely a desperate father seeking help for his daughter. He falls down on his knees and begs the miracle worker to come and see his daughter. The father's name is Jairus; the physician's name is Jesus. Will Jesus make a house call? Will he go and lay his healing hands on the little girl? Of course, he will.

If we were watching this story unfold in a movie theater, we might find ourselves on the edge of our seat with a Kleenex in hand wondering if Jesus will make it to the little girl before she takes her last breath. Of course, like many drama stories on the big screen, getting to the one who needs saving is often fraught with unexpected delays, and our story is no different. Our particular adrenaline pumping delay comes from yet another individual who is desperate for help. It is a woman who has been hemorrhaging for many years. We are told that over the years she has been to every doctor she could find, spending all the money she had trying to find a cure. As one of the many in the crowd who needed help that day, but as one who had no desire to draw attention to herself, she simply and quietly reached out and touched the hem of Jesus' garment. In that very moment, she felt something change within her and she knew that her years of desperation were over. She thought she could slip away unnoticed, but Jesus thought differently.

Jesus stops, determined to locate the woman. There was no slipping away, and so she responds by falling down and trembling before him. For you see, it was completely inappropriate, in fact it was wrong, for a woman to touch any man of faith in public, and this was especially true if she was bleeding. According to the norms of her society, bleeding like she was made her "unclean." But Jesus was unconcerned about that as he personally engages her in a public conversation and as he ministers to both her illness and her fears. It is typical Jesus, ignoring the norms of society to emphasize that a nameless, unclean woman is a valued child of God and worthy of healing and new life. It's a beautiful moment as Jesus tells her to "go in peace." (vs. 34) But there's actually no time to dwell on that beautiful moment, because, a girl is dying.

Perhaps we were momentarily distracted, but I doubt Jairus was. Can you imagine the impatient emotions of a father who knows that every second counts when it comes to the life of his daughter? His little girl may be breathing her last breath as Jesus takes time to stop and ask the absurd question, "Who touched my clothes?" (vs. 30) If Jesus was sensitive to the father's anguish, shouldn't he have just kept going? Couldn't Jesus have been content knowing that the woman was healed? But Jesus could not ignore the hemorrhaging woman any more than he could ignore the frantic

father, the dying daughter or any of us who might approach him with our own desperate need.

Our story does not tell us how Jairus felt when Jesus stopped to talk to the hurting woman, but I think we can imagine. We know what we would be thinking and feeling. And the thing is, in those delayed moments the father's worst fears are realized. As they are stopped in the middle of the road, Jairus sees someone he had left at home approaching him. He likely senses the news even before anything is said. It's the news no parent wants to receive, "Your daughter is dead..." (vs. 35)

But Jesus is still there, and he had not forgotten about Jairus and his daughter, just as he never forgets about us and those whom we hold dear. Likely, we have all wondered at some time or another, "Why does the Lord delay? Why isn't he quicker to respond to my requests? Doesn't he know the urgency of my need?" But in the midst of such questions, Jesus reaches out and places his hand upon us as he did Jairus, and he says, "Do not fear, only believe." (vs. 36b) Jesus was asking a lot of that grieving father in those moments, and sometimes he asks a lot of us as well.

Jesus makes his way to Jairus' house. He enters the room where the girl was lying, and as he takes her by the hand he says, "Little girl, get up." (vs. 41) She opens her eyes and we dab our eyes with a Kleenex. Her family and friends as well as all of us are amazed and filled with joy.

Desperate need is at the heart of these two healing stories. But there is something else, and that something else is the power and presence of God in Jesus Christ. This power and presence is more than able to address our human need, bringing hope and wholeness to body, mind and spirit. As Christians, we hold tightly to the promise that Christ is the Lord of life and death. When our lives are filled with a sense of desperation, when our needs are greater than what we can address ourselves, we do not give up because we know that Christ does not give up on us - we do not let go, because we know that Christ does not let go of us. Jesus comes to us in our need, whatever that need is, offering healing and wholeness.

In whatever way you are feeling broken, bruised, guilty, worn out, sick, stuck or in agony, come to the Lord. We have been assured this day that our need will not be ignored. Jesus will come to you, touch you and personally address the hurt and struggle that has a hold on your life.

Some of you today are suffering from physical illness, disease and disability - the physical is often easier to identify and pray about. However, there is a lot of other pain and suffering that can lead us to despair, that can cause us to feel desperate, that can diminish our lives. We know that sin sets up a barrier between us and God, between us and one another, and the burden of past sin can cause great suffering for those who carry it around. Some of you know well the pain of a broken relationship. There are secrets and lies that make us ill because we don't want to acknowledge them and we have no idea how to rid ourselves of them. There are the bad choices we have made that continue to have an effect on us. There are the burdens of life and living and loss that overwhelm us. The need is great, and sometimes we feel desperate, but the Good News is that the One who is able to heal is close by. Our hope today and every day is in the great physician, who is none other than Christ our Lord.

For the next several minutes, I invite you to honestly acknowledge your individual need as we invite God's healing presence into our midst. Following the Prayer of Thanksgiving over the oil, Pastor Nick and I will position ourselves at the rail and Karen will play music softly, you are then invited to come forward if so led. Kneel if able anywhere along the rail and pray for the healing you personally seek.

Sometimes individuals choose to come forward because of concern for the need of someone else. Pastor Nick and I will anoint you with oil on your forehead and lay our hand on your shoulder as pray we for you. The anointing is but an outward act, but it symbolizes the inward presence of Christ and the power of God's grace to bring healing, hope and new life to you. After anointing and when ready, return to your seat so if another wants to come to the rail there will be space. If you choose not to come forward, that's absolutely fine, Christ's healing touch can certainly rest upon you right where you are sitting and praying.