

Sunday, June 30, 2024
Psalm 130; Mark 5:21-43
"Come As You Are"

The Rev. Joan Withers Priest, preaching

I think most of you are familiar with the book Ecclesiastes where it says that there is an appropriate time for every matter under heaven: a time to keep silence and a time to speak, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to love and not love, to heal and not heal. A special time to laugh and a time to weep? Not for Jesus. An appropriate time to heal and a time not to? Not for Jesus. A good time to keep silence and a time to speak? Not for Jesus. Am I right?!

The Gospel of Mark tells the story that gets the time for healing and speaking and laughter and tears, all mixed up. It is a tale within a tale. The story begins with a desperate father, then a desperate woman, and nobody follows the right order or demonstrates the right use of time. It's all about being interrupted. Jesus being interrupted time and time again to demonstrate to us, that Jesus did not follow our view of time, he was on God's time. You see, what we may view as annoying, frustrating, constant interruptions – anyone with small children or small grandchildren knows exactly what I am talking about - Jesus viewed as just a normal part of his day, just the time between, the time between one event and another, the time between where you have been and where you are headed, and that time in between, is the place where significant healing and transformation can take place. See where I'm going with this our last Sunday together? This time we've had in between.

So if you recall from last week, the disciples went to the other side of the lake and healed some folks, but then they came back. No storm this time but just as Jesus gets out of the boat, a huge crowd gathers, and the first interruption to his day is Jairus. Jairus was a leader in the synagogue, a man of great power and influence. And in all humility Jairus literally falls at the feet of Jesus, begging for his help. It is incredible that this faithful member of the Sanhedrin, believes, knows, that Jesus can heal his daughter. A little girl whose life was largely viewed back then, well frankly, as unimportant. If you are going to save someone, Jesus, save a king, a soldier, a priest – not a little girl. But to Jesus all children, everyone is worthy of his time. And so with no questions asked, with no explanations given, Jesus got up and followed him. "And so he went."

With the crowd pressing in on him from all sides, he is interrupted again by a woman who touches the hem of his cloak. First of all, what in the world was this woman even doing there! This was a woman who at one time was probably quite prominent, with a family, a home, a place within her community, and enough wealth to visit many different doctors to find a cure for her illness. But in 12 years of struggle, 12 years! She had lost it all, because back then, if you were sick like she was sick, you were seen as unclean. And you were seen as unclean because you had probably done something wrong, something sinful in the eyes of God. And being unclean meant - she was not allowed to go into the marketplace to buy food, she was not allowed to worship in the temple, she was not allowed to be in her own home. The only way she could go into public at all, was if she put her hands across her lips and shouted "unclean" so that all could scatter.

For 12 years she had been suffering. To say this woman was desperate - would be putting it mildly. To say this woman was determined - would be putting it mildly. Just think of all the

social and religious taboos she is breaking by just being in that crowd! And then she has the gall to touch Jesus' garment but really, it's not like she could have approached him and asked to be cured - she was no daughter of a prominent leader. This woman truly believed that by just being close to Jesus, just touching his garment she could be made whole, a miracle could happen to her, to her.

So notice Jesus stops in his tracks and asks, okay, "who touched me?" In the latest issue of Presbyterian Outlook, the writer of the Commentary for this week's scripture lesson, the Rev. Carol Holbrook Prickett, thinking of the little 12-year-old who was also saved in this story, decided to ask a 12-year-old, a close friend named Evie, her take on this passage. And interestingly, also asked her to write parts of the liturgy, we used this little 12-year old's Prayer of Confession this morning. Pretty good! Anyway, she asked her about this part when it says Jesus felt power being taken from him and that is why he stops. Evie thought, what if he didn't feel power being taken from him, not power like superman coming into contact with kryptonite, losing actual superpower, but what if he felt the real suffering of this woman, and the real relief of this woman, and that is what caused him to stop. It was the need to acknowledge what had happened to this woman. (1) What if Jesus knew about this woman and could tell he relieved her suffering.

I love the disciple's response when Jesus asks, "who touched me?" They all but say - "seriously, Jesus, this is a huge crowd of people and we are trying to make our way to a very important person's home before his daughter dies; and you stop and ask who touched you - you've got to be kidding - who didn't touch you!"

Now Jesus could have just paused for a moment, noticed someone must have been cured or something had happened, and simply kept going - but he stops. Maybe if he kept going, the woman would have only thought it was a miracle or some kind of magic trick, not the touch of God, the transforming touch of God. He stops to make a point and to add that personal touch. For to God, no one is ever lost in the crowd, to God, time is irrelevant. Now the woman could have slipped away into the crowd and went away to celebrate she was finally cured, maybe by some kind of magic, but she took responsibility for what she had done, she came forward and with great courage, fear and trembling, thinking to herself, "please don't change this miracle, please!" and she tells Jesus, she was the one who touched him.

Can you imagine for a moment the reaction of the crowd pressing in on Jesus - standing very close to this woman - when she reveals who she is; they must have jumped back! She was a woman who went against all social constraints and purity laws but had such great faith that she was made well; and made well here means a complete healing of her body and soul, a complete restoration back into her home and her community and her place of worship. And Jesus goes on to bless her - go in peace, be free to live again. It wasn't magic, it was faith, your faith that saved you.

Jesus came to bring all to the table, especially those who think they are different, who we may find annoying, especially those who think they are unworthy, the unclean, tax collectors and sinner alike. People like you, people like me. This was Jesus' moment to model the inclusive nature of God. This woman was not an outcast, she was not annoying, she was not unclean, she was a daughter of God. And Jesus calls her a daughter who had been suffering for 12 years, and then he goes and heals a daughter who has been alive for 12 years. With these interruptions to Jesus, both move from certain death into new life.

This past week at Vacation Bible Camp was filled with interruptions, little children are notorious for that. We gathered children of all ages, backgrounds, social skills, some shy, some wanting to be the center of attention, some singing and dancing, some just observing the chaos. And all of us adults soon learned that it's about allowing ourselves to be interrupted, allowing ourselves to be in the presence of others who are very different than we are, to be being open to those intrusions by God. From the little girl who grabbed my hand and asked me to help her make huge bubbles and when I said I had to get back to work, she innocently asked, "you work here?!", to the boy who asked that we play that song about One Big Family again and again, because he really loved that one, or when we had no one to play the part of Jonah, one the youth said, sure I'll dress up like Jonah, have water sprayed on me, a huge hula hoop with green crepe paper put over me and confetti thrown at me, why not? Those little intrusions, unpredictable, maybe even annoying little moments are really what life is all about.

One day this week we talked about trust – God is a friend you can trust - and we had a few of the children do the trust fall – arms straight out, fall backwards, trusting we would catch them. It was funny to watch those who had never done this before, some just put their arms out and fell backwards with full trust, others really hesitated not fully trusting they would be caught. Isn't that also like life? Sometimes we're fully in, trusting all of life, and sometimes, fear and all kinds of other emotions, set in.

But the woman who touched Jesus and the leader of the synagogue Jarius, had full and complete trust that Jesus would heal. Now we come to another daughter of God, and a father whose faith is what makes his daughter live again. By the time we reach Jairus' home, the professional mourners have moved in and are wailing big time. Jesus tells them all to go away because the little girl is only asleep not dead, and they laugh at him. Laugh! It has been said, "laugh if you must, but get out of the way. He is the resurrection and the life." (2) Jesus, enters what is considered an unclean house of the dead little girl and touches her hand and gives her new life.

As busy as Jesus must have been, he took his time, he stopped, he spoke with; he got to know his people. He listened, answered questions, and then he blessed them. Maybe that *is* what it's like when we meet God, when we are interrupted, when we follow God's time, not our own. Jesus said, come as you are, broken, wounded, feeling lifeless, feeling helpless, come as you are with only your faith, your belief, weak or strong as it is. And I will give you strength for the day, hope for tomorrow, and love, love always. And you will be healed.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's "own" or "real" life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life--the life that God is sending [us] day by day."

A few years ago, I attended the second conference on the Art of Transitional Ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary. And the first thing we learned is that it is no longer called Interim Ministry - it is called transitional ministry and after many hours of classes I realized every ministry is transitional ministry and every church is in transition because we are always changing. Your time of transition doesn't end when I leave today because you, the church, is always transforming. At that conference, on our last evening together, they invited a guest lecturer, a pastor who was also a Jazz Pianist. He passed around his latest composition, his rendition of the hymn "Be Thou My Vision". On the sheet music there was one half page of musical notes and then a written note and then another one-half page of musical notes. That

was it. The note in the middle simply said – play as inspired. He related this piece of music to transitional ministry.

And so reflecting back on these past 18 months, we knew the beginning, notes of hello and getting to know each other, but then there was kind of a blank page and had to make our own way together in the dance, creating our own music together. And we know today is the end, well until Pastor Gin arrives in a month and the notes to follow getting to know a new pastor. But what if we were to look back on these months of our time together through the eyes of Jesus view of time, God's view of time. What if we were to look at the time we've had, between Pastor Wayne and Pastor Gin as kind of that impromptu jazz interlude, knowing one thing was always there - the God who guides us, sustains us, loves us, holds us, sometimes pushes us, sometimes forces us to change a little, sometimes keeps us from stepping too far off the edge, and yet, always holding our hand. What if we looked at this time as one big interruption, an important interruption in time, to help you refocus, re-energize, transform and get ready for a new beginning, a new page of notes.

This interruption was not about me or about you, it was all about learning to play crazy music together because in the end we love and believe in a living God. And if we believe God is in all of this. Why not consider every event, every ministry here, every encounter with another as an opportunity to offer the touch of God's love to another. Why not try to let God's time become our time. God has always been, God will forever be, and that's all that matters. The end is just the beginning of something amazing and new, the end is just the beginning of new life here and now! May it be so, Amen.

- (1) Prickett, The Rev. Carol Holbrook. Looking into the Lectionary, Presbyterian Outlook Magazine. June 30, 2024.
- (2) Brown, The Rev. Rosemary. "Standing up from a Kneeling Position."