

“Desperate Pursuits”13th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Mark 5: 21-43

7/1/18

Rev. Rob Carter

Prayer for Illumination

Holy God,

While we are yet still sinners,

ugly and unclean,

you welcome us... and hold us...

You bathe us grace and clothe us in love.

We long to grow closer to you and your Gospel Way, O Lord.

So open us... and speak to us, we pray.

And now, precious Lord, May your Spirit in the midst of my speaking and all of our hearing,
evoking faith and commitment unto you.

Through Christ we pray. Amen.

Mark 5: 21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.”

He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him.

Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “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.

“Desperate Pursuits”

It reads like two different stories. Two different realities Mark has sort of mashed together. Jairus and his sick little girl, and the hemorrhaging woman smack in the middle of it. But really, this is one story. One heart-wrenching, eye-opening story about a topic not you, or I, anyone else want to experience.

Because at its heart, this is a story about desperation. It’s about the father of a sick little girl. And he couldn’t help her. In fact, he couldn’t do anything for her, which was strange for Jairus. After all, Jairus was a well-to-do man of Hebrew society. He held a position of esteem in the synagogue, with all the authority and trappings that came along with it. So he was used to getting what he wanted. He was used to controlling his environment... meeting his own needs. What he wasn’t used to was this... having a problem he couldn’t do a single thing to fix. It was a nightmare too horrible for words. He would try anything... absolutely anything if it meant saving his 12 year old baby girl.

The woman who’d been hemorrhaging for 12 years, meanwhile, had already tried everything. She’d gone to every doctor, spending every last penny on remedies that didn’t work or made her feel even worse. So sick and penniless, she was cut off from society—an outcast. It had been so long... so long since she’d known the blessing of being whole, and healthy, and loved.

So while the details surrounding them couldn’t be more different—Jairus, the epitome of a respected member of the establishment, and the hemorrhaging woman, the epitome of disenfranchisement—together, they still tell the same tale of desperation.

For make no mistake. It’s wasn’t faith that led these poor souls to Jesus. Jairus was part of the religious establishment that had been opposing Jesus to this point. And Mark makes absolutely no mention of the woman’s faith at all. Rather, what sent Jairus to the feet of Christ is the exactly what sent the unnamed woman reaching out for the hem of Jesus’ cloak.

It’s what desperation does. Desperation tears down the facades. It strips away even the last illusion of self-reliance. It obliterates the ego, unveiling the raw fragility that surrounds what matters most. For Jairus, it was the health of his child. For the woman, it was uncovering wholeness once again.

So we need to note, friends, it wasn't faith that sent these two to Christ. It was desperation. Desperation is what opens them up to Jesus... and the new possibilities they could barely even hope for.

.....

Personally, I've known grief in my life. And I've known desperation. But two months ago I experienced desperation like none I'd ever known when our son's eye was traumatically injured. I don't like to talk about it much. I tend to act like an armadillo, just sort of roll up and keep to myself when the pain is too much. But I'm learning to fight this tendency, to be more open about the pain, because I know my story isn't the least bit unique. Not in its details, per se, but we all know the depths of desperation, don't we?

Some of us are desperate in ways similar to Jairus or the woman... desperate for the healing of a loved one or even ourselves.

Others, though, are desperate for something else. Like a new job... or a more stable income.

I think many are desperate simply for real, authentic relationships. Or desperate for reconciliation within old, broken relationships.

While many are desperate to shed the burdens of grief, or despair, or anger we've been carrying for far too long.

Some are desperate for purpose, a sense of meaning.

Others are desperate for a sense of self-worth amid a world that says we're only worth what we make, or how we look, or the citizenship we carry.

And I believe, friends, that we're all desperate... all yearning for something... well... different. Something that doesn't leave us hungry in just a few hours. Something that doesn't leave us fearing what tomorrow may bring.

But it's hard to confess our desperation, isn't it? So often it takes the death of a loved one or something like national strife or natural disasters to send us to our knees. Which makes me wonder, why is it so hard for us—disciples—to admit our radical, inexhaustible need for Christ in our lives at all times, in all places, amid all things? Shouldn't disciples be the very first to fall to our knees, admitting our complete and utter need God's grace in our lives?

Instead, we spend much of our lives trying to prove to others—and especially to ourselves—that we really are self-reliant. That we can take of ourselves, thank you very much. We try hard to pretend we've got things under control... that we can handle whatever comes our way. It's why we build savings accounts. It's why we carry insurance and make strategic plans for the future... which aren't bad things, really. I have a savings account. I have insurance.

But the danger in each of these things, along with so much else in this world, comes when we use them to shield ourselves from the reality of our lives. The reality we ignore... the reality we desperately try to deny. Namely, just like the unnamed hemorrhaging woman and the little girl's father, we, too, are frighteningly vulnerable and dangerously desperate for a security we cannot create—not with money, not with weapons. For the things that mean the most in the world, tend to also be the most fragile.

.....

So what would happen, friends... what would happen if we were to lay down our illusions of self-reliance and confess our desperation?

What would happen if we were to allow ourselves to fall at Christ's feet... naked and vulnerable... scars and shames all showing?

What if we were to confess the pains we can't control... what if we were to surrender the needs we cannot fill... what if we were to admit to our confusion... our exhaustion... our anger... our anxieties... our fear and vulnerability?

Do we trust Christ enough to admit our desperation before him? Do we believe he really will tend to us? Make us whole?

Now please hear me. I'm not saying that confessing our desperation will end our problems. Nor am I proclaiming that Jesus will bring your loved one back to life on this side of the grave.

Rather, I believe these miracle stories show us what can happen when we live our lives in touch with how desperate for Christ and Christian living we really are. I think they show us how life changes when we stop trying to secure our futures with every ounce we have, so that we can pour our energies into trusting and following the One who promises to accompany us through every darkness into light... who promises peace even in the face of disappointment... who shows us here, at this feast made up of broken bread and an overflowing cup, that God's promises really are true!

While we cannot save ourselves, the grace of God does what we can't... making whole what once was broken. Bringing to light what once was darkened. Bringing to peace what once was troubled. Bringing to life the hopes and peace that once seemed dead.

So let us prepare, friends, to come to this feast in just a bit... not as righteous disciples who have their acts together, but as the stumbling, struggling, broken brothers and sisters we are, desperate and ready to rely not on ourselves or the ways of this world, but upon the gifts of God for the people of God. Amen.