
In the Lord I Put My Hope

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 30 June 2024

Lamentations 3:22-33 • 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 • Mark 5:21-43



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today's Gospel presents two stories blended together. There is the story of Jairus, the synagogue official, who approaches Jesus and begs him to come and cure his daughter, who is deathly ill. And there is the story of the woman who has been suffering from bleeding for twelve years, and whose doctors have not been able to cure her. St Mark puts the two stories together, with the beginning and the ending of the Jairus story like the bread in a sandwich around the woman's story. It's an interesting way of telling the stories, which invites us to compare the two people, Jairus and the woman, and see what they might have in common.

Both people approach Jesus as he walks along the lake, surrounded by large crowds. They are both persistent, fighting their way through the throngs of

people to reach Jesus. Jairus does it openly, falling at Jesus' feet and asking for his help. The sick woman, on the other hand, doesn't approach Jesus directly; she works her way in through the crowd until she can touch his clothing, saying to herself, "If I just touch his clothes, I will get well." Why does she think this? Perhaps she has seen some of Jesus' other miraculous cures, in which he touches the afflicted person and heals him or her. Jesus had in fact cured many people by this point. There was the man with leprosy, when "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man" (Mark 1:41). There was the paralytic, whose friends lowered him on a cot through the roof of the house where Jesus was with the crows (2:1-5). And on another occasion Jesus healed "many who had various diseases" (1:34). So she must have felt that his touch would cure her.

Remember Beatlemania, back in the early- to mid-sixties, when huge crowds of screaming teenagers would surround the Beatles wherever they went? I've read that sometimes people would bring sick or crippled relatives and friends to try to get as close to the band as they could, feeling that the Beatles could cure them. That was mass hysteria. But it still happens. Crowds flock to famous people and ascribe ridiculous powers to them. Jesus' power was and is real; but not all who followed him really knew that, at this point; they were attracted by the spectacle and probably the wild rumours that circulated around Galilee and Jerusalem.

Did Jesus cure everyone who saw him walk past, or listened to him on the mountain or at the shore of the lake? No. Why were Jairus and the sick woman cured? The answer, of course, is faith. Both believed that Jesus could cure them. Where this faith came from — why these two people believed in Jesus, when many around them did not — is hard to tell. But their faith is presented to us as absolute. Jairus says to Jesus: "Please come and put your hands on my daughter so that she will get well and live!" Not: "Please try to help my daughter" or "Maybe you can help her." No, Jairus was confident, his faith as strong as that of the Roman centurion whose faith amazed Jesus so.

The woman's faith is just as strong, although she is too nervous to approach Jesus directly. "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Not: "I might be healed." Again, there is no doubt. What a gift to have faith so strong! It is always my prayer that God will strengthen my faith. And what is more important than faith? For our salvation depends on it. Yet it is a gift from God to have such faith. It takes our commitment, certainly, our conscious choice, but it also takes God's grace.

Faith is good, a blessing, a gift, but it is not valued by many in this world. We see when Jesus reaches Jairus' home, there is little faith there among those gathered outside. They make fun of Jesus when he tells them that the child is not dead. They laugh at him. And we, as Christians, also sometimes get

laughed at for our beliefs — or if not literally laughed at, we are at least thought a little foolish. If we have enough faith, it doesn't matter what the world thinks. These stories are clear demonstrations of what faith can do, or rather what Jesus will do for those who have faith.

Another thing these stories show us is that we can approach Jesus in different ways. Jairus came forward boldly, openly, and asked for Jesus' help. Likewise, a person today may make a direct prayer for healing. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy," Paul tells us in the Letter to the Hebrews (4:16). We may ask confidently for intercession through our great high priest, Jesus. The woman with the bleeding condition simply got close to Jesus, confident that she would be healed. She perhaps represents someone who has a long-time personal relationship with Jesus, but rarely prays directly for herself. In both cases, both approaches, their prayers are answered, for their faith is great.

Remember, then, that Jesus is always with us, and will answer our prayers. All we need to do is to follow him, and believe. As we heard in Lamentations:

The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue,
Fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise.

The Lord is all I have, and so in him I put my hope. (Lam 3:22-24)

Thanks be to God. Amen.