

St. John's Episcopal Church
The Reverend Audrey J. Murdock

Pentecost 4(B) Proper 8

June 28, 2009

Readings:

Samuel 1:1, 17-27

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 8: 7-15

Mark 5: 21-43

The healing of the daughter of Jairus is a story of many dimensions, but it is also a story that surrounds, encompasses, another story. The other story is another healing miracle. It is a story that is intricately woven into the story of the healing of this little girl. Just after Jairus begged Jesus to come and heal this daughter, Jesus immediately changed whatever plans he had and started out with the distressed father. It is at this point that the story within the story begins.

Listen again to what follows:

“And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him., Now, there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many doctors and has spent all that she had; still, she was no better, but rather had grown worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she thought, “If I but touch his clothes I shall be made well.” Immediately her haemorrhage stopped and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You can see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say “Who touched me?” However, he looked 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.”

The Gospel continues, a message came from the home of Jairus with the news that his daughter had died. Jesus ignored the message and went on to the home of Jairus. There the people had already begun their mourning and still Jesus persisted. He went in and took the hand of the child and told her to get up, and to the amazement of all, she did. And then Jesus asked them to give her something to eat. Here we have two stories of the healing of women; one a young child on the brink of womanhood and the other, a woman who by her disease was ritually unclean and consequently an outcast in society. The first is a story of a child whom Jesus went to see; she had an advocate, her Father, to intercede for her. Jesus' visit was a public event and the crowd knew that Jesus was going here. In fact, the publicity was potentially scandalous for Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. His great love for his little girl led him to humble himself and also risk his reputation as he begged the itinerant Jesus to heal his child.

In contrast, the woman with the haemorrhage had no one to intercede for her. Because she was ritually unclean she had to act covertly. Under Jewish law, she should not have touched a man, especially a holy man. Her approach to Jesus was daring and in secret. This makes her story unusual and particularly moving,

However, these two stories have some interesting parallels; the woman with the issue of blood had been suffering as long as the little girl had been living and the daughter of Jairus was just at that age in Jewish

society when a girl was recognized as a woman. Also, both women were designated as daughters. Jesus called the woman with the haemorrhage “Daughter,” the only time he used such an address. But more than all else, both of these stories are stories of faith. In Jairus we see faith struggling to be born despite fear of loss and ridicule. The woman with the haemorrhage dares to live the kind of faith that Jairus is struggling to find. She thought that all she needed to do was simply touch the garment of Jesus and she would be made well. In ancient times, belief in the curative powers of a healer’s garments, handkerchief, shadow, were not uncommon. Such things were viewed as extensions of the person. The woman wanted to touch Jesus and the expression “at least his garments” marked the intensity of her desire. Her faith overrode any fear of making Jesus unclean. I wonder if you notice any curious aspects to this healing?

Were you puzzled that the healing apparently took place before Jesus had knowledge of it? Did you wonder why he asked, “Who touched my garments?” And what he meant when he said he felt a power go out of him. This story is unique in raising such questions and the miracle can be understood in a variety of ways.

One possible interpretation comes from studies on healing. When healing takes place there is often a feeling like that of an electric current. Perhaps such a current is what Jesus experienced when the woman with the flow of blood drew forth his healing power by her faith. When Jesus said, ‘Your faith has made you well,’ he literally meant that. Jesus could certainly heal people of his own accord, but the faith of others apparently could draw upon his healing power and may even have been partially prerequisite for healing to occur.

Healing is a mystery that cannot be rationally understood. In this story there was an exchange of power or energy that preceded dialogue and had a compassion of its own. The subsequent dialogue formalized and reaffirmed the healing that had already taken place. Jesus’ words to the woman reaffirmed his willingness to heal, but asserted it was her faith that healed her. When he added, “Go in peace and be healed of your disease,” it was more than a dismissal. It was a reassurance that her disease was cured and would not return.

My grandmother used to use an expression which I always remember with a smile now although I didn’t understand it when I was younger - she would say, “You’ve got to pray with suction.” The woman with the haemorrhage prayed “with suction,” drawing healing and blessing from Jesus.

Such determination and such “suction” puts her in the company of the Canaanite woman whose intelligence and ready wit changed the mind of Jesus and also of the persistent widow in the parable who finally persuaded the unjust judge to vindicate her.

All of us have or have had private pain and in a sense, all of us bleed. But sometimes the pain takes over and it is as if we are constantly bleeding. The story of the woman tells us of release and healing after a long, long illness. She brings a message to those suffering chronic pain and long-term disease. At such times it is especially easy to feel far from God, but she continued to touch Jesus despite the crowd of things that could have come between them.

The healing of the daughter of Jairus tells of healing when all hope is gone. When Jesus said, “The child is not dead, but sleeping,” the crowd laughed at him. They were astonished at what they perceived as stubborn foolishness.

Jesus kept asking Jairus to have faith in spite of the crowd and his own anxiety as a parent. That is what Jesus asks of us; hope in the face of what seems utterly hopeless and faith to move mountains.

The good news of these healing stories is threefold. First of all, when God in Christ walked among the people, we see that God valued the feminine and sought to heal where it was ill or injured., Jesus valued women, young and old, rich and poor, socially acceptable and unacceptable. This is borne out in so many of the Gospel stories, but these stories tell us that Jesus went out of his way to heal a little girl and that he accepted and healed a woman who was ritually unclean.

These stories also emphasize the importance of our faith. It is a crucial element in healing and wholeness whether that faith struggles to overcome fear and despair, as in the case of Jairus, or it is a faith that knows no boundaries, as in the case of the woman. This latter faith rushes on, trusting fully in a good and loving God, who desires our restoration and our health. Jesus urges us to have such radical trust. The story within the story, it tells of a faith so strong that it drew out a blessing before it was consciously given.

I also believe that it is your story as well - by that I mean the story of this parish of ours that has kept on going on when the going seemed to be particularly tough and we can believe that truth that Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has made you well."

Amen