



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for March 13, 2022
“Laying Down Your Doubt”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Mark 5:21-43

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When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.”

Immediately her bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (Which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this and told them to give her something to eat.

Two Great Stories Read as One

Everybody likes an Oreo. What's there not to like about an Oreo? Two chocolate cookies with cream on the inside. They don't last very long around the Grieb household.

How you eat an Oreo has been a topic of discussion since they were first introduced way back in 1912. Some eat their Oreos by twisting them apart and eating the creams first. I am an eat them all at once, sort of guy. What do you like best, the cookies or the cream filling? Some have a decided opinion about that. Personally, I find that one only makes the other better.

Our scripture for today functions much like an Oreo Crème Sandwich, one part only makes the other part better.

Mark is famous for starting one story, only to interrupt it with another story, and then going back to the original story. Scholars call that a "*Markan Sandwich*."

Today, we consider two stories we read as one. The first is the story of the healing of Jairus' daughter and the other, the healing of the woman with a serious hemorrhage. One sought healing for his twelve-year old daughter, while the other sought healing for a twelve-year old disease.

The Healing of Jairus' Daughter

Jairus was desperate. His daughter was sick and close to death. He was willing to do anything to see his daughter live.

We are the same way. We'll do almost anything for our kids, particularly when it comes to their health and well-being. If you doubt that, visit Children's Hospital, and look at the desperation on the faces of the parents there.

In approaching Jesus as he did, Jairus had to lay down all sorts of things. Too much was at stake for him to have done otherwise. Jairus was a leader in his local synagogue. Approaching Jesus as he did would have put that in jeopardy. Again, too much was at stake for him not to have laid that aside. Jairus also checked his pride and let go of his fear. These things Jairus also had to lay down.

N. T. Wright puts it this way, "*Jairus pockets his pride and forgets his fear.*" We'd do well to do the same.

In the end, Jairus had to lay aside any doubts he may have had so he could put his faith in Christ to heal.

The Healing of the Woman with the Hemorrhage

Sandwiched in the middle of this story about Jairus' daughter is the story of a woman who had an uncontrollable hemorrhage. She too was desperate. As we said, the woman's hemorrhage had been with her for twelve years. She had tried everything to get well, spending everything she had in the process. Adding insult to injury, the woman had to face the daily indignity of being considered "*unclean*" by the so-called righteous of her day. In a word, the woman would do anything to be healed.

Jairus pleaded with Jesus to come and heal his daughter. The woman with the hemorrhage simply came up from behind and touched Jesus' cloak. She had put all doubt aside.

Her faith was so strong, she figured that that was all she needed to do to be healed. She was right.

“Daughter, your faith has made you well” has rung through the ages.

The Power of Connection

There are some things we can claim here. First, both stories talk about the power of connection, particularly when we connect with Christ. Staying connected with Christ is the very place we need to be. It is very much a part of the Lenten journey.

Jairus asked Jesus to come and lay hands on his daughter. The woman with the hemorrhage didn't even ask. She simply went up to Christ and took it upon herself to lay her hand on him.

The effect was the same, both were healed.

In visiting people in the hospital, I have noticed almost without fail that people will extend their hand toward mine. I have come to know that there is power in touch. There is power in connecting with one another.

This is an age where there are so many ways connect. Social media and the internet have broadened the horizon of connection more than at any other time in history. Yet it seems as if we are as distant and as disconnected as we've ever been.

The Pandemic has only made that worse. Far too many have been isolated for far too long. We need to look for ways to connect with one another. We were not created to go it alone.

The Power of Faith over Doubt

The two stories we are considering today are stories not only about the power of connection, but the power of faith over doubt. It's interesting that in both stories, the people involved sought out Christ in their desperation.

It might be that **you're** feeling a bit desperate today. Jesus stands to heal you as well.

The persons involved in the two stories we read today had nowhere else to turn and in that the beginnings of faith were birthed. Sure, they must have had their doubts, but they laid those aside to encounter the miraculous power of Christ.

We all have doubts. It's only human. Some really struggle with doubt to the point that their doubts play havoc with their relationship with Christ. These folk can't seem hurdle their doubts which keeps them from truly believing. The fact of the matter is that doubt has a way of either eroding our faith or catalyzing it.

It's important that we don't become so accustomed to our doubts that we cease to fight through them toward a deeper walk with Christ. As Jesus says in Matthew 7:7, *“Seek and you shall find.”*

I have often said that doubt is the kissing cousin of faith; one side of the same coin, faith on one side, doubt on the other. Doubt will either drive us to despair or drive us closer to Christ.

Frederick Buechner calls doubt *“the ants in the pants of faith. Doubt keeps faith awake and moving.”*

Jairus laid down his doubts and sought out Christ. That connection brought about good things for him and his daughter. He had gotten to the place where he could do no other but believe. The woman did the same. She was so sure about Christ's power that she figured all she needed to do was touch his garment. She too had gotten to the place of deep faith.

The writer of Hebrews says this about faith. *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* (Hebrews 11:1)

As we all know, with all that conspires to drag us down, it is hard to sometimes muster the assurance and conviction necessary to be truly faithful. God stands to help us with that. Even in times of doubt, God works to awaken us to his love.

He honors us with his presence every time we turn his way, and even when we don't, God is at work to make his presence known.

Is There Anybody Else Up There?

I love the story told of the man who was walking in a jungle when he came upon a tiger. He began to run as fast as he could with the tiger close behind. It wasn't long before the man came to a cliff. He had a split decision to make. He could either be eaten by the tiger or take his chances by jumping off the cliff. The man chose the cliff.

As the man fell, he grabbed onto a tree that was jutting out from the rock. Immediately, the man began to yell, *"Is there anybody up there?"* He continued, until he heard a voice from heaven, *"Yes. What do you need?"*

To that the man replied, *"Lord, I'll do anything, anything you ask, if you would just save me."*

It was then that the Lord said two words, *"Let go."*

With that the man said, *"Is there anybody else up there?"*

Lay Down Your Doubts

James 1:6 has this to say about doubt, *"But when we ask, we must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind."* James 1:6

We'd do well to face our doubts head on, even struggle with them, all with an interest of laying them down so we might know the power of faith over those doubts.

Lay Down Your Doubts is a great Lenten theme. It's the very thing God wants us to do as we seek to grow closer to Christ, the very one wants to heal our lives as well.

The Lord wanted the man to *"let go."* He wants us to do the same as we put our trust in him to sustain us. *"Is there anybody else up there?"* was the man's response. I pray that's not our question. I pray we're the ones who let go every time.

"Fear not, I am with you," says the Lord. *"Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* (Isaiah 41:10)