

4th Sunday After Pentecost January 28, 2024
Mark 5:21-43 - Healing of 2 daughters

In today's Gospel, we find a nested story of two suffering women and Jesus, who saves each from her respective hopeless state. Mark starts to tell the story about Jairus and his sick daughter who ultimately died, but was raised from the dead by Jesus. In the *middle* of this story, Mark tells us *another* story about a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years.

Jairus was a man of order and tradition, a synagogue ruler who oversaw worship arrangements and rituals and was a caretaker of the facility. His day-to-day life required planning and predictability, but on this day something beyond the ordinary and conventional was needed. He would need a miracle, and faith that Jesus could enact it. So with desperate faith, the dying girl's father seeks out the One who was rumoured to do the impossible. He pushes through the crowd and, upon seeing Jesus, humbly prostrates himself at his feet and unceasingly begs him to "come and lay his hands on his daughter so that she may be made well and live."

Hope is on the horizon as Jesus sets out for Jairus' place but is quickly dashed when their journey is interrupted by the bleeding woman. In the delay, Jairus receives the devastating news that his daughter has died. Death has won; hope is lost. What is the point of Jesus visiting a dead girl now? ... so presumes the messenger from Jairus' household. Jesus, on the other hand, thinks differently. He reassures Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." To Jesus' disciples, these are familiar words, words reminiscent of what Jesus asked

them the night he made the raging sea “smooth as glass.” The Message: “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” Will Jesus come through this time as he did then? Can Jesus, who has already been shown to have authority over nature, demons, and disease overcome death too?

How long the journey must have felt to the father who had just lost his little daughter! How many times he must have repeated Jesus’ words to himself! “Only believe!” He had no idea of what Jesus would do next, or what might come out of this tragedy. There are things about God that are just “too great and too marvellous” for human beings to comprehend. As we heard in our Psalm, Jairus had to “still his soul and make it quiet,” in the presence of Jesus, and rest and hope in him.

The chaos of weeping and wailing back at home threatens to toss Jairus back into waves of fear and doubt. Then he hears Jesus say to the mourners, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” People laugh at Jesus, but Jesus is unflustered. Jesus is confident about a future that no one else yet sees. He takes Jairus and his wife into the room where their daughter lies, where he will make the future he sees into their present reality. Taking the girl’s lifeless hand into his, he simply commands her: “Little girl, get up!” Immediately, the girl obeys. She is full of life — she gets up, walks around, and is well enough to eat. All who see the miracle are amazed.

There’s a story about a Ph. D. student in mathematics who was to

take his final exam. Unfortunately, he arrived late for the exam. Everybody else had already started. On the blackboard were three math problems. The late student sat down immediately and started working on the problems. He worked feverishly for an hour and a half. Everyone else finished the test and left. He said to himself, "What an idiot I am. I'm the last one here taking the test. I must be MUCH slower than any of the others in this class."

He had finished only two problems and he felt for certain that he was going to fail his math test. You can't leave a third of the test unanswered and not fail. He was very upset. He came up to the professor and said, "Professor, I didn't finish the last problem. Would you please let me finish the third problem and bring it in later tonight? Please, I promise to get the third problem done and bring it to you." The professor said it was permissible. The student turned in his calculations for the two problems he did finish and went to work on the third problem.

He worked all afternoon. He worked into the night. He worked until midnight and finally finished the third problem. He rushed it over to the professor's office which, of course, was closed by then. He slipped his solution under the door and went home exhausted. Early the next morning, his phone rang and it was his professor who excitedly said to him, "Young man, you are a genius. You are brighter than bright. I have never seen anything like it."

The stunned student asked, "What do you mean?" The professor explained, "The first two problems on the board were the actual test.

The third problem was a brain teaser. I have NEVER had a student finish that problem. No student of mine has ever gotten it right. You have done something that no other student has ever done before.”

The student had arrived late for the test and was unaware that the third problem was impossible to solve. He didn't know that it was a brain teaser, an impossible challenge. The power of believing! The power of faith! We experience it in our lives daily. There are all kinds of signs that simply say, “Believe.” “Have faith.” We certainly see a lot of that as athletes prepare for the Olympics or other high level competitions.

The story which interrupted the first story, is a faith story. It is a story about a woman who had the power of faith. She's not given a name in the Bible. She's a “no-name” person. But, let's call her Rachel rather than “the woman”. She had been bleeding now for twelve years. She felt that she was an embarrassment, to herself, her family, and the people around her. Because of her bleeding, Jewish law had declared her unclean. She could not come to the temple. She could not come in contact with anyone. She was treated like a leper, an outcast, a reject from society – someone people would talk about.

“You know about that Rachel, don't you?”

“You heard, didn't you?”

“Of course, you've heard the rumours. Anybody who has been that sick for that many years must have done something really terrible to receive that kind of punishment from God.”

(whispering) “Wait 'til I tell you this one. I think I know what

Rachel did that was so incredibly bad to become so sick. ”
And the result? Rachel was an outcast.

Rachel searched out numerous doctors, for twelve long years. Having visited every doctor she had heard of, and given them all her money, Rachel’s condition had not improved at all and had even grown worse.

Rachel had heard that Jesus had the power to heal – she had a deep belief that Jesus could heal her – she was absolutely convinced that Jesus could do it. Hers was a magical, even a superstitious faith. She said, “If only I could touch the fringe of his garment, I will be healed.”

She may have thought: “He doesn’t need to see me. He doesn’t need to speak to me. He doesn’t need to lay his hands on me. He doesn’t have to touch me. He doesn’t need to spit in the mud, and wipe that spittle across my eyes.” Rachel had complete faith in Jesus’ power to heal. A large crowd was gathering around Jesus and they were all jammed together, pushing, shoving, as if they were trying to get the autograph of some religious superstar.

According to the details of the story, Rachel came up *behind* Jesus, so he wouldn’t even see her. She *knelt down* and she touched the *fringe* of the tassel of his robe and she was healed immediately. It was like instant radiation, as if magical healing flowed from Jesus’ body into hers. Jesus turned around and asked, “Who touched me?” The disciples responded, “What do you mean? Everybody has been

touching you. Everybody is rubbing against you and pushing. It's crowded here."

Jesus said, "Healing power has gone from me. Who in this crowd touched me and received healing power?" Jesus began looking around and Rachel couldn't hide. She couldn't hide from Jesus' eyes. She came up to Jesus, knelt down, and started crying, because she was scared. She was crying and trembling. She was petrified. She said, "Jesus, I touched you. I was healed. I needed to be healed."

She told him the whole truth. Rachel told Jesus her whole life story, her story about bleeding for twelve years, all the rejection, all the doctors, all the poverty. Jesus looked down at her and said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over."

How does such a primitive, magical, superstitious story apply to us who are part of a scientific generation, some twenty centuries later? How does a story about a woman whose faith seems almost magical, apply to us who live in a technological age? We who have numerous doctors, hospitals, and medical research centres available to us; how does this story apply to our world today?

Although this story is first and foremost about Rachel, it is also a story about Jesus. This story is about the Son of God. And the power of God lived in Jesus like in no other human before him or after him. The power of God was in Jesus to heal, to restore, to

make whole. This is a story about Jesus who had the power over the wind and the waves – about Jesus who had the power over disease, as well the power over death as he raised Jairus’ daughter from death. The Spirit and power of God were with and within Jesus. No one before or after him has had such power. Even though this story is primarily about Jesus, it is also about Rachel.

Rachel displays three important qualities. The first is that she wanted to be healed. She wanted to be made whole. She wanted to be healthy; she wanted to be a part of her community. Rachel is a contrast to the crowd. The crowd didn’t want healing. The crowd wanted to see a religious superstar. They wanted to rub shoulders with Jesus. They wanted to get his autograph. They wanted to chat with the superstar, so they could go and tell their friends about meeting him. They wanted to listen to Jesus so they could brag about it. The crowd wasn’t coming to be healed. The crowd wasn’t looking to have their lives made whole. They were there just to rub shoulders with Jesus and hoped they might see one of his miracles first hand so they could entertain their friends with a good story.

This still happens today in the life of the church. It’s possible for people to come to church and hear stories about Jesus; to rub shoulders with Jesus; to see their friends at church; to have their kids influenced by the youth ministries of the church; but not necessarily come to find healing for their own lives. It’s possible for us to come to church today, and not to have Christ make our lives whole because, we don’t always see our need for healing. We think, “Things are pretty good in my life. I don’t need to be healed. I came

to church today because it's what I do on Sunday mornings. That's all. I don't need to be healed."

But Rachel realized that she needed to be healed. She was aware of the disease in her body. She was aware of the inner anxiety within herself. She was aware that she did not have her life all together. Rachel came to Jesus that day with no façade. She came for help, to ask Jesus to heal her.

Hopefully, we can learn from Rachel's example; we can all come wanting and looking to be healed by Jesus. Jesus said, "Only the people who know that they are sick want to see a doctor." And only those people who are spiritually sick really want and need to see Jesus.

Rachel's second quality is that she told Jesus the whole truth about herself: her rejection for twelve years; her search for doctors; her poverty; her feelings of guilt for what she had done wrong to be punished, but wasn't quite sure what it was. We are invited to do the same: to tell Jesus the whole truth about ourselves. The details. The particulars. The minutiae.

Rachel's third quality is her great faith. Hers was a deep faith in the power of Jesus to make her whole. Hers was a simple faith, superstitious, even magical. She said, "If only I touch the hem of his garment, I will be healed." It was her deep faith that helped to heal her – it was a major contributor to her healing. Her healing was not the cause of her faith.

It is the opposite for people who think, “Lord, show me a miracle. God, if you heal me or my loved one, then I will really believe in you.” But, not Rachel. She had that basic faith and as a result of that basic faith, God healed her. What was the object of Rachel’s faith? Was her faith in her own abilities to solve her problem? No. She had been sick for too long to have faith in her own abilities. Was her faith in her own self confidence? No. She didn’t have much. Was her faith a faith in faith? No. Was her faith in positive thinking? No.

Today, we see a lot of faith in positive thinking. “You gotta have the power of positive thinking to get ahead in this world. If you think positively, life will go better for you.” However, the New Testament, over and over, talks about faith in Christ. “**Faith in Christ**” is a phrase that is repeated some **345 times**. Again and again, it is faith IN CHRIST – It is never faith in faith or faith in positive thinking or faith in self-confidence.

But, just because one believes in the power of Christ, it does not mean one will be healed of one’s diseases. You may say to yourselves, “If I really believed like Rachel, I too would be healed. I would be healed of this cancer. I would be healed of this inner torment. My husband would be healed. My marriage would be healed. If I only believed like Rachel, then I would experience healing in my life.”

That isn’t the point of the story. Just because one has deep faith, that does not mean that one will inevitably experience healing. It just doesn’t work that way. Even devout Christians, with the deepest of

faith, die. We all do. Things are done according to the mystery of God and these things are beyond our comprehension. Today's gospel is a story about Jesus who calmed the wind and the waves; who healed Rachel; who raised Jairus' daughter from the dead.

This story is an invitation for us to have this simple faith in Christ and the power of God. This story is an invitation to call upon Christ, the power of God, for all our needs.

Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE for JANUARY 28, 2024

We bring before you our prayers for your Creation, your living church and for all those in need.

Loving God, our holy Friend, you invite us to share your love for the world with others. While we are here praying for the world's healing, others are busy going about the work of healing and reconciliation. Later, when we are living each day trying to give of our best, may others remember to pray for us too.

Give your grace to all peacemakers; those who endeavour to resolve with justice all conflicts between nations, in governments and within communities, in families, marriage partners, committed relationships, among colleagues, and friends. Help us also be peace makers.

Endow health care workers and those involved in social justice issues with your sustaining grace; those who treat illnesses and diseases, bind up wounds, feed the hungry, re-settle and care for the homeless, care for the orphan, visit the prisoner, encourage those living with physical or mental disabilities, those who tend to the dying and grieve with the sorrowful.

Bless the ministry and outreach of this congregation with your enabling grace. We pray especially for the students and staff of Central Middle School. Let us be joyful in worship, welcoming in fellowship, inclusive in our ministry to all, courageous and thoughtful in our decision making, gracious and sensitive in sharing the good news with others, and humble and open to learning through our ecumenical endeavours.

Bless and protect any servants of yours whose lives are in peril as followers of Christ. We give thanks for the release of the six Sisters of St Anne, their driver and another passenger, who have been freed and are safe, after having been kidnapped last week in Haiti. Give courage to those without the support, companionship and encouragement of other Christians. May your steadfast presence and your grace renew them daily, and may they know your Holy Spirit as their constant

companion and counsellor.

Merciful God, when people are disregarded and devalued because of their religion, poverty, geography or disease; when compassion and justice is withheld to some because of sexuality, race or gender; help us to remember how Jesus always crossed boundaries to welcome those who were excluded, marginalized, victimized, or voiceless. In these times of rising anti-Semitism voices, and as we remember on Holocaust Day the horrors and crimes committed against people of Jewish faith and heritage, help us to value, respect, and welcome one another and appreciate the beauty and strength found in our diversity and inclusiveness that can enrich us all.

Nurturing God, you know us better than we know ourselves; you know us each by name and love us as beloved siblings in Christ. We are grateful that You provide us with loved ones as a source of support and guidance. They help us to grow into the person you envision us to be, unique and beautiful just as we are. Yet, sadly, there are those who do not experience such acceptance, love, and support. Heal relationships between families and children, and help us all to be better, more loving and accepting. We pray especially that your loving presence be with all who are on a journey of self- discovery. Surround them with the loving support of family and friends especially as they explore and claim their sexual or gender identity. Today, we especially pray for our siblings, your beloved children, who are discriminated against, abused, disowned, and unloved, because of their gender identity or sexual identity. Give them the assurance that they are your beloved child now and always. Help us to become a truly loving community and a safe place where all are welcome.

Homecoming God, be with all those who cannot return home, or for whom visiting their hometown causes anxiety or stress. We remember especially today those who are in exile or are refugees in war torn regions of the world, those who have lost their children, and for those families traumatized and separated through our immigration system. Guide those who are moving to new homes, schools, jobs, and towns, and for military personnel deployed or returning from overseas

assignments. May they anticipate a warm homecoming. Be a guiding light for all who are experiencing changes and transitions in their lives.

Loving Creator, our prayer today is for the Church and its leaders, Bishops Susan and Kathy, Anglican Primate Linda Nicolls, Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, all pastors, priests, deacons, councils, musicians, and lay leaders; for Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran, Langley and Rev. Kristen Steele, for Rev. Matthew Senf, newly appointed assistant bishop for ecumenical and interfaith relations in our BC Synod, for St. Mark's Lutheran, Vancouver and Rev. Ingrid Cramer-Doerschel, for the congregation of San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastora Ana Maria Jara.

Reconciling Christ, bless our efforts to bring about reconciliation. Give us the strength to persevere without counting the cost, and to find within ourselves the capacity to keep on loving. Bless us and bless all who engage in your sacred work of envisioning new wholeness and bringing people and nations together. In the name of the ever-compassionate, patient, and healing Christ we offer these prayers.

Amen.

God in Community, Holy in One, make us one Body, united from many, as we pray as Jesus taught us, saying,

Our Father ...