

Sermon Proper 8 YR B  
June 30, 2024  
St. Paul's Cleveland Heights  
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May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

In today's gospel we have the continuation of Jesus' journey across the lake and back. Jesus has calmed the storm that had experienced fisherman believing they were going to die. Before the eyes of the gentile Gerasene's on the lake's other side, Jesus drove evil spirits from the demented, out of control man, named Legion and into pigs who ran into the sea and drowned. This caused the Gerasenes to be very afraid and begged Jesus to leave them. So back Jesus went, into the boat and back to the Jewish side of the lake where his reputation, healings and talk of God's Kingdom had continued to spread, and a huge crowd awaited him.

We now encounter two healing miracles, one buried within the other. Both of these stories demonstrate unmitigated faith in Jesus from both ends of the social spectrum. We have Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, falling at Jesus' feet, begging for his daughter's life – "come and lay your hands on her so that she can live!" (Mark 5:23)

This is a person who is a leader in the community who is acknowledging that Jesus' authority surpasses his own. Jesus responds and immediately moves toward Jairus' home. In the midst of this huge crowd that has gathered, Jesus senses power leaving him and asks who has touched him. The disciples are wondering who has **not** touched him as the crowd is massive. However, Jesus was able to discern the touch of his garment by one whose faith is so strong that she knows she will be healed just by that touch. Faith and love win! But Jesus doesn't stop there. He seeks out the person who has touched him, not to chide, but to recognize and develop relationship with the person.

He stops his journey to the home of an "important person" to tend to and seek relationship with an outcast of society. With Jesus, the needs of the marginalized and the vulnerable outcast are as important as the needs of the socially prominent person. This unnamed, socially discarded woman's faith, in spite of her fear of breaking the required cultural norms, has been rewarded in her faith – she is healed!

Jesus then continues on to the daughter of Jairus, in spite of the heckling, laughter, and derision he received from the bystanders, not only because they didn't understand why Jesus would delay getting to a prominent person's daughter to pay attention to a social outcast, but because they also thought Jesus didn't know sleeping from dead. Yet Jesus carried on, telling Jairus, "do not fear, only believe." (Mark 5:36) And Jairus, in spite of his fear for his daughter, had faith in Jesus and his faith was rewarded. His daughter lived! Faith and love win!

In reflecting on these two healing stories, I began to wonder – what exactly is faith? Where does it come from; how do we live in faith? How does faith overcome fear? Have you figured that out yet? I think I am still working on that.

Defining faith can get tricky. The International Dictionary of the Bible talks about faith this way, describing its meaning from both a Greek and Hebrew language usage. "Faith, faithfulness - in the Greek, the basic range of the term in its actual usage, ... is from the sense of subjective confidence in someone/something else, to the objective basis for such confidence: A subjective believing on the basis that the one/object trusted is reliable – "trust, confidence, faith"; and that which evokes trust – faithfulness, reliability, fidelity, commitment." The Latin *fides* has the same basic range – "trust" in a person or thing, and "that which produces confidence or belief, trustworthiness, faithfulness, credibility."

The Hebrew terms are more weighted toward the objective end - stability, reliability, faithfulness, whereas the Greek extends more into the subjective sense of "trust in, believing, faith" ....

The basic meaning of the Greek verb is simply “trust, put faith in, rely on a person, thing, or statement.” The Hebrew also indicates “trust in, reliance on”, but basically is an expression of confidence in the **object** of that trust. In the Hebrew usage, trust includes a recognition and affirmation of the trustworthiness of the object of the one trusted; the stability and security of believing (faith), as predicated on the stability and reliability (faithfulness) of the one relied on. (The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible pg 408”)

That is a lot of words to have us think about the trustworthiness of Jesus, of God. What did the woman have faith in? What did she believe? And what about Jairus, the leader in the Synagogue - where was his faith – what was his faith placed in? Think about how God has acted in your life and how those actions have led to your sense of trust, the strength of your faith, your belief that God is trustworthy and reliable.

I tend to believe that faith is not just something that happens to us, but faith is a decision we make. I believe that we choose God and choose to believe, that like the woman and Jairus, we can put our faith in Jesus, faith in our God. They have proven over and over again they are stable, reliable, and oh so trustworthy.

Jesus said to Jairus – Do not fear – only believe. Easier said than done sometimes, isn't it? In spite of the fact that we are told in some form to not fear about 365 times in scripture – once for every day of the year - How often, in spite of our best efforts, fear creeps into our thinking, our being? And how often do we receive a gentle, subtle nudge back?

“Do not fear, only believe!” Faith has been described as the attitude and action of believing. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Please allow me to give you an example of one of those gentle nudges – something I experienced this week. I was walking dogs, and as I usually do, I was talking to God. I usually use this time to give thanks and admire God's beautiful creation in nature. However, on this occasion I began ruminating about things that were weighing on me, causing me anxiety and, I must admit, some discomfort and even some fear over unknown outcomes and my ability to get things done and done correctly. When my mind finally stopped yammering at God, a thought popped into my head. Actually, it was a hymn that I hadn't heard in a long time. And the title of that hymn – “ Be not afraid”! I have to confess that got my attention! The words go like this:

You shall cross the barren desert  
But you shall not die of thirst  
You shall wander far in safety  
Though you do not know the way  
You shall speak your words in foreign lands  
And all will understand  
You shall see the face of God and live

#### [Verse 2]

If you pass through raging waters in the sea  
You shall not drown  
If you walk amid the burning flames  
You shall not be harmed  
If you stand before the power of hell  
And death is at your side  
Know that I am with you through it all

#### [Verse 3]

Blessed are your poor  
For the kingdom shall be theirs

Blessed are you that weep and mourn  
For one day you shall laugh  
And if wicked men (tongues) insult and hate you  
All because of Me  
Blessed, blessed are you!

[Verse 4: added 2007]

And when the earth has turned beneath you  
And your voice is seldom heard  
When the flood of gifts that blessed your life  
Has long since ebbed away  
When your mind is thick and hope is thin  
And dark is all around  
I will stand beside you till the dawn

And the chorus, that sung after each verse is:

Be not afraid

I go before you always

Come follow Me

And I will give you rest

(Lyrics Bob Dufford)

Be not afraid – this hymn kept playing in my mind and what I found was a renewed sense of calm and peace – what I call a God nudge or poke.

This is just a small example of how I believe that God, through our Lord Jesus, demonstrates God's great trustworthiness and allows us to have faith in God. No matter our circumstances, we can trust that our God walks with us in all things and at all times. God doesn't always respond in big, flamboyant actions. It is up to us to have the awareness to look for the many, sometimes small and subtle ways God sends God's love, and this gives us a renewed attitude and action of believing.

Just as the woman and Jairus had faith in Jesus, just as they acted on that faith in spite of fear and trepidation, so can we follow their example and believe that Faith can cast out all fear so that Faith and love win! Amen.