

Sermon for Sunday, July 1, 2018 - "Tune Out the Fear"

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

July 1, 2018

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

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Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

This is a noisy, crowded story that has many echoes in our world today.

There's a great crowd pressing in on Jesus. The original Greek also implies that this crowd was squeezed together with Jesus.

There are lots of loud voices - voices that deride, doubt and laugh at Jesus while he shows compassion to those who are vulnerable.

Those loud people seem to think Jesus faces an either/or situation. EITHER he hurries to save the daughter of the synagogue leader in time; OR he stops to tend to an anonymous person who has reached out for healing. They see a zero-sum game with winners and losers.

The disciples seem to think Jesus should choose Jairus, the synagogue leader, as the winner. He's a person of wealth and influence who could probably help Jesus out. Jesus should get on his good side.

So, when Jesus stops on his way to Jairus's house to search for some random person who's touched his cloak, the disciples mock him saying, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'"

Jesus keeps looking anyway. The woman who touched him and was healed is afraid, but she takes a risk anyway. She comes forward to tell him what she's done to seek healing - she has broken the law. A woman in her condition should not have touched Jesus, but she risked and trusted. Jesus sees her fear and her faith. The faith, he says, has made her well, made her whole.

While he's talking with this woman, Jairus' friends come to say, "Your daughter's dead - there's no use asking Jesus for help, why bother, there's nothing he can do now, you've lost."

Jesus goes anyway and prepares to heal Jairus's daughter even as the people gathered at the house laugh at him.

The particulars of this story may seem pretty foreign, but we certainly know what it's like to be squeezed by so many pressing needs in our world and our personal lives. We know about loud, derisive, mocking voices - they are everywhere in our culture today.

We know how easy it is to view things as either/or choices, a zero sum game. Either we prioritize our own needs over others, or we won't have enough - enough time, enough energy, enough money. Either

we are a nation with laws, or we treat people humanely. Either we are passionate about what we believe, or we are kind. Our moral imaginations are hindered by these false choices all the time.

We also know something of the temptation to help those who are influential and powerful, while just moving right past unknown people who reach out for help.

Jesus is pressed and squeezed by all of these things. Yet Jesus acts with compassion anyway - tending the unnamed woman AND healing Jairus' daughter.

Jesus chooses not to listen to all the jeering voices. His choice here lost in translation but it's really significant.

When Jairus' friends come to tell him, "Don't bother, too late, you lost", Jesus pays no attention to them. That's what the Greek says, at least. Most Bible translations say that Jesus overhears them but that's not what the Greek phrase used here means - it means that Jesus pays no heed to the words they are speaking.

Jesus tunes out the angry, mocking voices.

He tunes into a truer voice, the voice of God - the voice that says again and again throughout scripture, "Do not fear but believe." Jesus listens to this voice and tells Jairus and all of us to not be afraid, to trust God. Do not fear scarcity. Trust that God's compassion and mercy is enough for you and enough that you, too, can be a compassionate presence in the world.

Do not fear losing in a zero-sum game; trust that we are all connected as children of God. What harms others, harms each of us; what heals others, heals us.

Do not be overwhelmed by all the needs, by all the false choices. Trust that the God of the cross brings new life even when everything looks hopeless.

Trust that it matters when you stop and tend those who are vulnerable.

Jesus tunes into God's voice telling him all of this so he has what he needs to be about the work of God's kingdom - the work of justice and mercy.

We, too, are called to tune into the voice of God. We are called to be followers of Jesus and not give in to the power of fear, even when there are so many loud voices trying to profit from our fears.

Yet, so often we are afraid, overwhelmed and paralyzed. So often we struggle to trust and follow Jesus.

Thanks be to God - it isn't up to us to get over our fear and to trust. Jesus works to help and to heal us, just as he healed the unnamed woman and Jairus' daughter.

Jesus touches us - through scripture, through the promises of baptism, through Holy Communion, through the gathered community. Jesus tends to us, Jesus heals us, Jesus helps us so that we can live with faith, so that in the face of fear, we act anyway - like the woman who approached to tell him her story even when she was afraid.

When everyone was mocking and jeering, Jesus told Jairus, "Do not fear, but believe." Then Jesus went to his daughter and lifted her up.

Jesus comes to us today to say to us, "Do not be afraid, trust me." He comes to take our hands and raise us up into faith and hope. We have what we need to follow Jesus. We have what we need to do the work of God's kingdom - the work of justice and mercy.

Let's take a moment for prayer.

