

Sermon for Sunday, June 30, 2024
Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
"A Daring Woman and A Desperate Father"
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Decorah, Iowa

[Scriptures for this Sunday](#)

This is a remarkably powerful and dramatic story about two people who are desperately in need of Jesus' healing power. Except for their need, these two folks are about as different as they can be. Jairus is a community leader, well known and well respected. He's married. He has a family. He has a home. Yet in spite of all that, he is in deep distress because his daughter is critically ill – in fact she is dying. No physician can bring his child the healing she needs, so he turns to Jesus and begs for mercy.

Then there is a woman who is unnamed – as are many women in scripture. She is a person without standing in the community. She is not accompanied by a husband, father, or brother. We don't know if she even has any family. But we do know that because of her flow of blood and the existence of strict purity laws, she is an outcast – she is unclean and untouchable. She has completely exhausted all avenues of healing that are available to her, so in one bold and daring last attempt to get what she needs, she reaches out to Jesus.

Jesus has just gotten off the boat on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, and crowds of people have already gathered to see him. Jairus makes his way through the crowd and falls at Jesus' feet – which for a man of his standing is a stunning act of humility – and begs Jesus over and over again to come and heal his daughter. And Jesus, who's heart is pure compassion and mercy, agrees and together they start off towards Jairus' house.

But suddenly there is a disruption. The woman has very quietly made her way towards Jesus, not like Jairus did, coming up to face him directly, but from behind. In secret. Then, in a stunning act of courage, she reaches out and touches Jesus' clothing. Immediately she is healed. And just as immediately, Jesus knows it and stops dead in his tracks.

Jairus was probably frantic at this point – the sort of feeling anyone with a terribly ill child would experience. He had probably wished that Jesus would take off and run with him all the way back to his house. But now Jesus is sidetracked by this needy, disruptive woman.

Jesus wants to know who touched him. Of course, I think Jesus knows who touched him and was healed. But Jesus wants something more than physical healing for this woman. Jesus wants to

see her, to bless her, and to restore her in a very public manner to life within the community. And of course those well-intentioned but bumbling disciples tell Jesus he's being ridiculous. I imagine that everything must have become very still the moment Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" Everyone was holding their breath, waiting to see what would happen next.

If I were her, I think I would have hidden myself, and hoped that Jesus didn't notice me. Maybe try to slink away in the crowd. You see, by being in public, brushing up against other humans, by touching Jesus, she has violated any number of social and moral laws. She would have been expecting public condemnation. But this woman has courage. Even though she is literally trembling in fear, she throws herself at Jesus' feet, trusting that the one who has blessed her with healing will also now show mercy. In an act of great vulnerability, in front of all those people, she tells Jesus of the years of suffering, of spending herself into medical debt on doctors who couldn't help her, of growing sicker and weaker, and being cut off from her faith community and her friends.

And Jesus listened. He gave her all the time that it took to tell her story. He didn't rush her. He honored her truth. He validated her as one worthy to be heard, to be included, to be restored, to be healed. Jesus addresses her as "daughter" which is a term of endearment, and he praises her faith as the source of her healing. He gives her the credit! Then, he blesses her: Go in Peace, in Hebrew, Shalom – a word which connotes a fullness of well-being, a wholeness, a space in which all is well with one's heart, and soul, and body and mind.

Then the friends of Jairus appear to tell him the devastating news that his daughter has died. There's no need to trouble Jesus anymore ... But Jesus looks Jairus straight in the eyes and says: Don't be afraid. Trust me. Believe. I imagine that Jairus was so overcome by emotion that he couldn't even speak. So they continued to Jairus's home where the broken-hearted people are weeping and wailing. Jesus takes a look at this and says, "Don't worry - the little girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping." You might remember that Jesus says the same thing in John's gospel when Martha comes to him to tell him that her brother is dead. And they make fun of Jesus – they laugh in his face.

Jesus doesn't back down. He moves confidently forward, taking the child's parents and his disciples and goes into the room where they have laid her. And he touches her – another action that violates the purity codes, for to touch a dead body rendered you unclean. He speaks to this beloved child and says: "Little Girl – get up." And she does. She is restored to life before their eyes. Restored to health. Restored to her family and to her community. Desperation is turned to joy. Wailing and mourning are turned into dancing.

Dear friends, where do we go when we find ourselves in the midst of despair? When our health, our resources, our well-intentioned efforts, are not enough?

I think about the families who have witnessed their homes washed away in the floods in Iowa, Minnesota, and across the Midwest. I think about the people caught up in endless cycles of violence and retribution in Palestine, Israel, Ukraine, Sudan, and Haiti. I think about our own country suffering from such deep mistrust and divisions. I think about the recent Supreme Court decision that allows cities to criminalize homelessness. I feel despair creeping into my soul when I listen to the news and hear of all these things, and more ... so much more.

Like Jairus and this beautiful, courageous, unnamed woman, we must bring all of our sorrow and despair right to the feet of Jesus. Isn't this why we gather here week after week? This is a place where unconditional welcome is extended to all people, regardless of gender identity, economic status, race, creed, or abilities. This is a place where all of who we are is welcomed into the loving presence of God - a God who we see revealed in the compassionate, healing, restorative life of Jesus. This is a place where it is safe to be who we are, to love who we love, to offer the gifts God has given to us, trusting that they will be received with gratitude and used to serve others. Let us come to Jesus. Let us bring all of ourselves - our joys and sadness, our hope and despair, our needs and thanksgivings - and offer it up to the one whose steadfast love never fails, and whose mercies are new every morning. Let us come and reach out our hands and allow Jesus to touch all the hurting places in our lives with God's love. Let us receive all that God has to give in the bread and wine at this table, and then go out to share God's unconditional love and mercy with the world.