

Sixth Weekend After Pentecost (B/RCL):
Mark 5:21-43
June 30-July 1, 2018
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

There's a great exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art called "Heavenly Bodies." It's not about planets and stars and galaxies; for that, you've got to go the Hayden Planetarium at the Museum of Natural History! The Heavenly Bodies exhibit at the Met is about holy fashion: exquisitely embroidered liturgical vestments from the Vatican, gorgeous gowns for life-sized statues of Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, modern-day attire by Chanel, Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, and other designers influenced by their Roman Catholic faith. There are other religious items, too – beautiful statues of Mother & Child, jewelry, papal tiaras and mitres, and something called "reliquaries," fancy containers for relics of saints. One holds an arm bone; another a skull (!); others hold pieces of fabric from the clothes of those believed to be "saints." (Luther wasn't big on relics... always emphasizing that the Lord Jesus is our Savior, the One who intercedes, goes to bat for us before the Father, and that we don't need other intermediaries.)

But having just seen the exhibit, as I studied today's Gospel I couldn't help but think that the robe Jesus wore the day the woman with the hemorrhage reached out to him would have been an **award-winning** relic! (I'm sure the author of the book *The Robe*, which became a famous movie, would have agreed.) By the way, this belief in material objects holding spiritual blessings isn't only an excess of the Middle Ages. In the Book of Acts we read this:

*God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the **handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin** were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them. (Acts 19:11-12)*

And:

*Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that **Peter's shadow** might fall on some of them as he came by. (Acts 5:14-15)*

The woman in today's Gospel whose name never got recorded reached out to touch the Lord's robe in faith, in hope, in desperation. Equally desperate was Jairus, the father of the little girl who lay at death's door, a story that stands like bookends at either side of this week's Gospel. Some people feel it's not fair to go to God when you're desperate if you haven't gone there before. But the reality is: **any**

reason to turn to God is a good one! Keep in your mind's eye the picture of the father scanning the horizon longingly, lovingly, for the return of his prodigal son.... or prodigal daughter, as the case may be.

So **why** were the woman and the man desperate and how did it show?

The woman had been bleeding for 12 years. Think back to what you were doing 12 years ago, in 2006. Can you imagine how depleted you'd feel, how anemic you'd be today if you'd been hemorrhaging the whole time between then and now?? In those days, it wasn't just that the woman was **sick**. She was ritually **unclean**, meaning that she couldn't be in worship, she couldn't sit in a chair anybody else sat in, she couldn't be in close proximity to any man. She was an outcast in her religious community and even in her own family. How horribly lonely.... We're told she went to a lot of doctors, all of whom took her money but none of whom gave her a cure. Maybe she'd even tried the weird treatments for female bleeding suggested in the Talmud: carrying around a barley corn you'd found in the dung of a white donkey or putting in your pocket the ashes of an ostrich egg wrapped up in a linen rag in summer and a cotton rag in winter.¹

Then somebody tells our dear friend Anonymous about Jesus who works wonders. And she breaks out of her virtual house arrest! This lady is the patron saint of all those who've ever said, "It's easier to ask forgiveness than permission." No way she should be out and about in a crowd. Any man who knowingly brushed against her would be barred from worship for days! There's **such** a crush of people the disciples are incredulous when Jesus wonders out loud who brushed against Him. They're thinking, "Who **didn't** brush against you??"

Jesus feels power leave Him, like the lights dimming when the air conditioning comes on: a dip in energy because it's been channeled elsewhere. What a great reminder for us that there's a "cost to the cure" that Jesus gives. (The big cost, of course, to the cure of our sin, is our Lord's suffering and death on the cross.) There's a cost to Him at the home of Jairus, too, though, right? What's the price He pays there?

The people **ridicule** Jesus when He says the little girl is **asleep**, not **dead**. Interesting – in the Fourth Gospel two days after Jesus gets word that Lazarus is very sick, He tells the disciples, "*Our friend*

Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” ... Jesus... had been speaking about his death, but they thought he was referring merely to sleep (John 11:11, 13). (It’s also interesting that in Greek mythology Sleep (Hypnos) and Death (Thanatos) are sisters....) But the point is that Jesus’ suffers ridicule for His complete trust in the Father’s power to save. Whatever our Lord encounters, we should be prepared to encounter too. So: we need to be more like Jesus, who was sensitive to human suffering but insensitive/impervious to human criticism. The only opinion that mattered to our Lord Jesus was that of our Father in heaven.

Notice: the woman’s “unclean” state doesn’t pass to Jesus when she touches His robe. His health passes to her. Likewise, the little girl’s death doesn’t pass to Jesus when He touches her. His life passes to her. Philip Yancey calls it “**reverse contagion.**” Luther called it the **great exchange/happy swap**: Jesus takes our sickness and gives us health; Jesus takes our sin and gives us salvation; Jesus takes our earthly sadness and gives us heavenly joy; Jesus takes our spiritual poverty and gives us holy wealth. Remember this verse from today’s epistle?

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9)

The woman with the hemorrhage was desperate for her own healing, desperate enough to break the taboo of touching someone else. Jairus was desperate for his daughter’s healing, desperate enough to risk the criticism and censure of the rest of the leaders and members of the synagogue. After all, Jesus was an itinerant preacher passing through town. His ministry was controversial. Jairus was an Establishment-type; Jesus wasn’t. But Jairus risked his reputation and his position by going to the only one he knew who could possibly remove his child from the threshold of death’s door.

This weekend we honor and thank JJ Simpson-Keelan for pouring herself out for our children, youth, and families as our volunteer Director of Youth & Family Ministry. Her goal has been not only to teach and mentor the kids, but to invite and empower parents to spiritually nurture their own children. This Saturday evening we also celebrate the baptism of Aria Faith Meredith. So it’s fitting for me to share

this reflection from a Scripture commentary about Jairus' passion to bring his little girl to Jesus' attention.

The author puts himself in the place of any loving parent and writes:

“Clothes I can provide, and food and home and education;
but for the deep resources of life,
for truly saving power,
I must follow Jairus,
see Jesus, and say,
'My little daughter.' ['My little son.']²

We all want the best for children! We bring our daughters and sons to Jesus when they are baptized and when we fulfill baptismal promises to bring them early and often to Sunday School, to the Lord's Table, to Confirmation, to worship (even in the summer!), to meaningful service opportunities, to fun fellowship events. We bring them because we realize they need much more than we can give them, and because we're quite sure they need everything Jesus has to give them.

The first verse of the hymn “Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether” goes like this:

Draw us in the Spirit's tether,
for when humbly in your name
two or three are met together,
You are in the midst of them.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Touch we now your garment's hem. (ELW 470)

We don't need the physical garment Jesus wore and that the woman touched; we don't need any reliquary to display it. We have the Lord Himself, really present in His Body & Blood in, with and under the Bread & Wine of this holy Sacrament. He calls us to reach out and touch Him in faith, prayerfully bring Him to our children's side, boldly risk all to claim and serve Him as Savior and Lord. Amen

¹William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Daily Study Bible series, rev. ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 129.

²*Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7 (NY: Abingdon, 1951), p. 718.