

Sermon Proper 8 2018

July 1, 2018

Mark 5:21-43

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

Affliction creates desperation, doesn't it? I am sure you have seen it in your own lives and experiences. You have seen it when you have been most afflicted, when those you know have suffered the greatest losses. In those times desperation reaches its zenith. And we see it in our lesson this morning.

First there is Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue: apparently a faithful and pious man; a loving father. And you can hear the desperation, as **“he fell at [Jesus] feet and implored him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.’”** Any parent can hear that and relate. If you've ever had child that was on death's door, I'm sure you know it all the more: “Lord please you can heal my child! Just grant my daughter, so that she won't die!”

And then there's the desperation of the woman. Twelve years she has lived with this ailment. Bleeding that hasn't stopped. And this bleeding would be bad enough, but as a Jew this meant not only all of the difficulty and pain that would come with the particular affliction. It meant not only the apparently exorbitant doctors' bills she had to pay—giving up her livelihood for them. It meant not only the apparent varied and contradictory treatments she had undergone. No it meant all of this challenge, plus the fact that she was considered unclean. She was not a part of the community. She was not allowed a place in regular life. For twelve years, under the Law, she was required to live away from regular interaction. And worst of all, she was not allowed to participate in the regular worship of the Temple. How many people bemoan being in church, and here this woman wanted to be there, and wasn't permitted by virtue of her ailment? And you hear the desperation: **“If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.”** “If I can just put my fingers on the hem of his cloak, just grasp onto to that robe, His power will bring relief! Will bring respite and new life!” Oh the hope!

But like I said, I am sure you all know that to some extent or another. Or you have seen it. And there's the part of us that asks why, isn't there? There is the wondering of why things have to be so difficult. Why do we have to know such struggle, such sorrow? I am sure you've heard me say it ad nauseam, of course this is

the result of sin. Our rebellion against God coming to roost. In fact, we are reminded of that in the Old Testament reading this morning. **“The Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.”** The Lord doesn’t do this willingly. This isn’t what He would have chosen for us. Like a loving Father, He knew exactly the path that would bring about the greatest prosperity for us. He knew that our faithfulness to Him would keep us safe, keep us living, keep us well. And yet what did we choose? We chose rebellion. We chose sin. We chose the mystery behind door number two, where we thought God was certainly hiding something, rather than door number one: the promise of His certain care and provision. We chose it then and we choose it now.

And so this affliction is that consequence. It is the Law, being spoken to us that we can’t earn our way back. Sure we can try but it won’t work. If you remember a few weeks ago we read the story of the Fall into sin. We didn’t read it in that passage, but do you remember what Adam and Eve did when they fell? They ate of that fruit. They realized they were naked, and do you remember how they tried to clothe themselves? They put on fig leaves. They realized they had done something wrong, and they tried to make it right. And think about that from God’s perspective. How ridiculous, right? How irrational: I was created naked, I have been walking in fellowship with the One who created me, and now I have done this thing He told me not to do. I know! I’ll hide from Him, and if He finds me, He’ll find me with clothing! That won’t be obvious!

And yet this is us. We seek to earn our way into His graces. We seek to win back His pleasure with our own efforts. Is that even possible? No! Trying to be good enough to get to heaven is just another silly attempt at fig leaves. And so this affliction comes and it reminds us of how far we have fallen. In fact, just after the portion from Lamentations for our lesson this morning, it makes a point about this. It says, **“Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins? Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord!”** What right do we have to complain about affliction? Yes God doesn’t want to send this affliction, but it’s the punishment for our sins. That suffering that the woman experiences is ours. That death that Jairus’ daughter suffers is ours. The despair Jairus knows is ours.

And what does Jesus say in the midst of all of this. Look at it. Here Jairus has heard that His daughter is dead. It’s too late right? His worst fear is realized. And

Jesus was so close. Yet what happened? There's this crowd, there's this desperate woman. This woman who got what she wanted, yes, but now Jairus has to live with the consequences. And what does Jesus say? **"Do not fear, only believe."** Don't be afraid Jairus. I can take care of this. Don't be afraid Christian. Do not fear. Only believe.

Easy to say, right? When we're in the midst of the trial, it's a lot harder to deal with. By that I mean, not in those times when there's a glimmer of hope. For example, I was so thankful this week to hear the ruling of the Supreme Court on the abortion law in California. Did you hear that? The Supreme Court ruled that the State of California could not require pro-life women's health clinics to advertise for low-cost abortions. We see those, and we still have hope for the protection of God's people in our day. And it's good for us to give thanks for that. It's good for us to give thanks as we see these things in the midst of all of the ways it appears that our culture is going to become increasingly opposed to the views of Christians in relation to so many things. It's good for us to give thanks in a time like this for the hope that things will not be that much harder for us. But then there are those times when that hope seems all but lost. Those times like these two in our story. Those times where there appears no light.

This week I was studying Romans Chapter Four and Abraham, and was reminded of what Paul says about Abraham there. If you remember Abraham, he's the one who is the Father in the Faith for Christians, and for Jews before us. He is the one to whom the Lord promised that His people would be given a Promised Land—something we see given to them after the Exodus and crossing over into the Jordan in the book of Joshua. And then there's the more difficult promise. The promise that connects to our conversation this morning: the promise that through Abraham's Offspring all nations would be blest. Not just the Jews, not just Abraham's descendants by blood, but all people, Jews and Gentiles. But what does this have to do with what we're talking about today?

Well, look at Abraham's circumstances. God said Abraham would have offspring, not only offspring, but an offspring with his wife Sarah. Paul says of this that Abraham hoped against hope. Why does Paul say that? Abraham was almost a hundred and Sarah was ninety. One hundred year old men don't have children, all the more with ninety year-old women. It doesn't happen, does it? Post-menopausal women don't have children, let alone with centenarians. But what's the point? They couldn't do it. Their circumstances pointed them to every impossibility of this happening. And yet

what do we see? Well, first we see Isaac, the literal offspring of Abraham. And through Isaac ultimately we see Jesus, the Offspring through whom all nations were blessed, not just Jews, but Jews and gentiles.

And Christians, this tells you just what this offspring of Abraham said Jairus. Christian, hope against hope. Don't be afraid, just believe. When all hope is lost, trust. In fact, in his commentary on Jonah, Luther said this, *"the heart finds solace when it hastens to the angry God with the aid of the Holy Spirit and seeks mercy amid the wrath, lets God punish and at the same time dares to find comfort in His goodness."* The heart finds solace when it dares to find comfort in His goodness. In other words, even when you know this affliction is punishment that you deserve, even when you see the desperation that it brings, dare to find comfort in the goodness of this God. Don't be afraid, but believe. Believe in this Jesus who saves. Believe that just as He said to Jairus' daughter, **"Little Girl I say to you arise,"** He will say the same to your body on the last day because He has been raised from the dead. Believe that just as He told that woman, **"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease,"**—literally, "Your faith has saved you"—believe that just as He told her that, He says to you, your affliction will come to an end, your faith has made you well, be healed of your sin. Believe that this Jesus is the One who heals, the physician who doesn't suffer that you be drained of your life-savings like they did for this woman, but that He is the Physician who by His suffering heals you. The Healer whose affliction—far worse than yours now—relieves your affliction. And believe that He gives you His medicine of His body and blood. Believe that He speaks that healing into your ear, *"Be it done for you as you have believed. According to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace."*

Yes Christian, go in peace. Go in peace, falling at His feet knowing that no matter what the world around you shows you, no matter the affliction that comes, no matter the desperation you see and feel, He is there to heal you. He is there as the One who even brings affliction to you that your affliction would ultimately come to an end. That is, that You would be healed by Him, the One who will care for you. Even when you try to clothe yourself and fool Him, He'll know better, He'll clothe you. Clothe you with His goodness, His righteousness and purity forever—freed from all desperation eternally. Amen.