

July 24, 2016

HEALING POWER

Matthew 9:18-26

The healing story of the woman who touched the fringe of Jesus' cloak is an interruption in the story of the raising of the ruler's daughter. Having set out in response to the desperate plea of the ruler on behalf of his dead daughter, Jesus was stopped unexpectedly by the woman who had suffered for twelve years with hemorrhaging.

What do we do with the interruptions in our lives? Interruptions are unexpected intrusions into our routines. Sometimes things come up, invading our time, during our business-as-usual that, in various ways, distract us from the immediate purpose at hand. It's like they interfere. Often because they are so unexpected, they are unwelcome. But it is when we can see them as a natural part of a much larger picture (and a much larger purpose), that they can begin to be seen as a part of God's plan! Healing was a part of Christ's immediate plan. Though the summons to the home of the ruler may have been an interruption itself, Jesus responded. On his way to the ruler's home, this unnamed woman reached out to Him. She may never have intended for Jesus to stop. She didn't really want to barge in or deter Him from His primary purpose. She didn't really mean to become an interruption. No. She wanted to go unnoticed. But... Jesus noticed her. After she was healed, Jesus spoke very graciously to her, telling her that her faith had made her well.

We need to see interruptions, sometimes, as God's plans overriding our own.

In the parallel story in Mark (Mark 5:21-43) and Luke (Luke 8:40-56); (Mark is the one with the most detail), the ruler's name is Jairus, he is a ruler of the synagogue, and his daughter is not dead, but fading fast. His appeal is for Jesus to come to heal his daughter. And after the woman with the hemorrhage is healed, another interruption came: someone from the house of Jairus arrived to say that his daughter was dead, don't bother the teacher any longer. (Luke 8:49) Death can be life's biggest interruption. Not for the one who dies, necessarily, but for those who lose them. Everything must be put on hold for the loved ones who survive in order for them to deal with this dark intrusion. Dark? Sometimes. Often, however, death comes at the end of a good long life – we tend to think it's supposed to – and it can be an experience of wonderful light. But in this case, the dying person seems too young to die. We want children to live to adulthood, and have a full life. But...as universal as God's great gift of healing is, healing is not always possible – we live in a fallen world, and death was one result of the Fall. Sorry to say, but death is universal too. Sometimes it just can't be stopped. Although death may be a terrible interruption in the plans and activities of the one who dies, death is their ending, and... a new glorious beginning! But for those who live on... it is a grave interruption. Sometimes, the living can finish what the one who died was trying to do; but most often; this sort of interruption changes our lives a great deal. For many family members, friends, and acquaintances, their lives are, in many ways, put on hold. Business-as-usual is not going to happen anymore, at least for a while. You shift into a different gear where grief tweaks compassion and concern calls for comfort.

For Jairus' family, healing no longer seemed relevant – *“Do not trouble the teacher anymore.”* “Let's stop distracting Him...” “Let's no longer be the interruption we have become.” But... Jesus was not troubled. He still cared. He noticed their resignation and said, *“Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved!”* (Luke 9:50) And at that very moment, Jesus put *all of them* on hold. “What? You can still do something about my daughter?” And we, who are followers of Christ, know that He is *“the Resurrection and the Life... those who believe in Me, even though they die, will live; and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die!”* (John 11:25-26) Jesus has dominion over life... and death!

The way Matthew (and Mark) tells the story; the people at Jairus' house were grieving with so much commotion that Jesus became an interruption to them. He says she is not dead, but is only sleeping.

“And they laughed at Him.” (v. 24) First of all, you can’t tell someone in the throes of grief not to weep. Crying is a natural part of grief.

Tears are not a sign of weakness, but of grief.

They are not a sign of doubt, or, a lack of faith, but of pain. These mourners may have cared so much for their pastor – Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue – that it hurt them to know that his daughter’s death would have hurt him. When grief is shared it is divided. Somehow it helps to know that others are hurt by what is hurting you. That’s called sympathy.

There is such a finality to death that it hurts. When life is over, it is over, and they knew it. But Jesus told them all to believe. *“Do not fear, only believe!”* When all has been done for someone, we tend to say, *“I’m afraid there’s nothing more we can do.”* Do not fear. Jesus is saying. *“It’s not over till I say it’s over!”* Then Jesus *“went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose!* (Matthew 9:25) They were all stunned with amazement! In Mark and Luke, Jesus tells the family to get the girl something to eat. Nothing brings us out of shock like doing something practical.

These two healing stories are about confidence in Christ. But, they’re also about humility. Too modest and embarrassed about her unsolvable problem to come forward publicly, the woman snuck up behind Jesus thinking that all she had to do was touch Him and she would be healed. (9:21) The ruler was so confident in Christ that she believed He could raise his daughter from death. The humility at Jairus’ house fell to the mourners who laughed at Jesus.

But consider... what is your level of confidence in Christ? Most of us, because we are believers, would never want to admit a lack of confidence in Christ. Faith is both trust and confidence. Do you have just a little bit of faith? Well, then, you should be able to *move mountains!*

The woman seems to have a simple, small faith: *“If I only touch His garment...”* (v.21) So what was it that made the power go out of Christ? In both Mark and Luke, Jesus wants to know who touched Him because He *“perceived that power had gone forth from Him!”* (Mark 5:30; Luke 8:46) And why, when the crowd was pressing in on Him, touching Him as if He was a candidate running for political office, did power only go out of Him into the woman who touched His clothes from behind? The answer to that is that the power He had was in *her* faith in Him, and in her desperate need. Faith, plus need, equals power! Paul said that God told him, *“My power is made perfect in weakness!”* (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Consider the hope of your reach and the power of your touch. Jesus never purposefully willed the woman’s healing. It happened because of her faith in Him. The little girl was raised by His touch. God’s healing power brings us new life. There is peace in healing. Peace is a natural product of faith. Even a simple faith can offer us a mountain of peace. Even a simple touch of belief can bring us the power of Christ. That power is among us.

Healing is a great and wonderful gift. We may yet die. But by Christ we are raised! Celebrate these great gifts!