

Wesley United Methodist Church Rev. Beverly E Stenmark
July 8, 2018
Title: Taking a Risk
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:7-15
Mark 5:21-43

Do you remember being asked in school to write a paper to “compare and contrast” two stories, or poems, or other items? When I read today’s Gospel, I think about that exercise. There is a lot to compare and contrast in the two miracles in today’s Gospel.

In some respects, the two women who were healed couldn’t be more different. In fact, in our culture, we would be more inclined to call them a woman and a girl, rather than two women. As is typical in most of the Bible and in the culture of the time, we never learn their names, although the girl is identified as the daughter of Jairus.

In 1st century Israel, women were typically identified by their relationship to the men who were responsible for them. Jairus was one of the leaders of the synagogue, a man of importance, respected, and influential. He came to Jesus to advocate for his daughter who was close to death.

She was twelve years old, just becoming a woman, just entering her child-bearing years and so she was at just about the most valuable status that a woman could have in a society dominated by honor codes. She has a man to advocate for her, she (or her family) have wealth, status, position and societal value.

She has everything that the bleeding woman doesn’t have. She has been sick for twelve years. She has no money because she has spent everything she had on doctors who have been unable to cure her. She has not gotten any better; she has gotten only worse.

Religious law says that she is ritually unclean. We have difficulty understanding that today, but it was a really big thing in first century Judaism. She cannot touch any other person. She cannot sit on the same chair that someone else will sit on. She cannot prepare food that someone else will eat and cannot use the same utensils that someone else might touch. She needs to keep her distance from others so that she doesn't accidentally touch someone and make that person unclean. She was not allowed to be in a crowd and she was not even allowed to attend the synagogue.

If she had a husband or children twelve years ago when she first started to hemorrhage, she has not been able to hug, hold or kiss her children or her husband. For all practical intents and purposes, she is now on her own and in a society where women needed to have a man to take care of them. She does not have a man to go to Jesus and advocate for her.

Two very different women – both are dying – one, at the peak of her life, is dying suddenly and unexpectedly; the other is dying slowly and surely over a long period of time, never getting better, only getting worse; she has been in the process of dying as long as the other has been alive.

There is more about them that is different than is similar, but their healing is alike in a couple of important ways. In both cases, coming to Jesus was motivated by fear – fear of death, fear of never getting better. They are both in urgent need. They have done all they could and were now to the point of despair.

We might think we understand Jairus' fear. We can understand the fear of a parent whose child is dying. What we might not realize right away is that Jairus is also taking a personal and community risk in coming to

Jesus. Even as early as the first few chapters of Mark's gospel, there has been trouble between Jesus and the religious authorities. Yet, Jairus is so afraid for his daughter, so desperate, that he comes to Jesus in public. He falls at his feet – recognizing Jesus' authority. This could not have been easy for him to do, but in his desperation to save his daughter he is willing to take the risk.

Jesus might say, “no” to him. Why should Jesus help someone who is a member of the group that is challenging him? His colleagues might harass him or give him a hard time for going to Jesus, for falling at his feet, for acknowledging Jesus' authority. He may very well lose his position as a leader in the synagogue. But, he is a father who simply wants his daughter to live and he is willing to do whatever it takes to save his daughter.

Both Jairus and the unnamed woman must cross boundaries to come to Jesus.

The woman had to cross multiple boundaries. Women did not address men in public and definitely not a man to whom she was not related. But even more so, she had to cross the boundary of many other religious laws. By even getting close to Jesus, by even becoming part of the crowd that followed Jesus she risked contaminating others – making them ritually unclean – and just as importantly, she was breaking Jewish religious law.

As she made her way through the crowd, undoubtedly brushing against people in the tightly pressed crowd following Jesus, she thought to herself, “If I can only touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Unlike Jairus, who came directly to Jesus and begged Jesus to come and heal his daughter, this woman not only did not want to draw attention to herself, she hoped no one would notice her. She tried to just sneak in, touch Jesus'

robe, believing that this would do what all the doctors had not been able to do.

She was taking a serious risk. If someone recognized her, if she was found out, she could be arrested for breaking the law, but she was desperate. She was at the end of her rope; she had tried everything, she was desperate and like Jairus, this was the only option she could come up with. She snuck up behind Jesus, reached out and touched his robe.

Mark likes to use the word “immediately” when talking about Jesus and does so now twice. “Immediately, her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.” It was what she wanted. She probably wanted to jump for joy and celebrate. She was free – but her elation was short lived. Mark then tells us that, “Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’”

Can you imagine what happened inside her right then? She had made it! She was healed. She would be safe. All she had to do was get out of the crowd without anyone seeing her and get a Doctor to confirm her healing and she could begin to build a new life for herself. If she had family, she could be reunited with them. Once again, she would be part of society – no longer an outcast. But, she was caught. Jesus had felt her touch him or had felt the healing power flowing out of his body.

The disciples made light of what he asked. They were in the middle of a crowd that was pressing in on him, how could he possibly ask who had touched him? Maybe she could still escape.

But, Jesus stopped. He looked around to see who had touched him. She knew what she had to do. In great fear and trembling, she came forward and fell down before him and told the whole truth. She had made it

to safety, she had been healed, but what would happen now? Would Jesus become angry and take away her healing? Would the authorities arrest her for breaking the law?

This week, while I was meditating on this passage, I found myself thinking about immigrants trying to cross our border. People who are afraid for themselves or their children. When the place where they have lived is no longer safe, people take a risk. Do they come directly to the border guards and ask for asylum, or do they try to sneak in and find their own safety? Like Jairus and the woman, they come at great risk; they come feeling desperate, thinking this is the only option left for them to try. They come, not knowing what they will find, and what will happen when they either speak directly to those with authority, or when they try to sneak past those who guard the access to safety.

I think of others who find themselves taking great risk, trying to find healing, safety, and wholeness. Some of you know that I have done some work around domestic violence. One of the things that will always stay with me, is the realization that the risks in leaving a dangerous situation are often the same as the risks of staying in an abusive situation. And yet, believing that there is a possibility of a safer life, of healing, of a future, they take the risk even though it is frightening and dangerous.

Sometimes medical decisions are risky. Job changes can be frightening. Growing old can be scary. Relationships needing healing can be intimidating. It is not unusual for us to have to cross boundaries when we come to Jesus seeking healing of whatever kind.

What happened to the frightened and trembling woman when she spoke to Jesus, despite her fear? What happened when she admitted that

she had stolen a healing from Jesus and that she had broken the law by entering the crowd?

Jesus cared who had the courage and faith to violate the purity codes and touch him. Interrupting his journey to see the dying child of an important synagogue official, Jesus stopped to find out who had touched him; who had been healed. He did so, not to rebuke her, but rather to relate to her. She told him the whole truth. She confessed what she had done, and his response was, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."

Immediately, she has gone from being nobody to being somebody. She has gone from being an outcast to being a beloved daughter. Jesus made a priority out of the woman's concerns. He acknowledged her existence, and her actions and he commended her, symbolically equalizing her status with that of the child. Jesus attends to the woman and only then does he continue his journey to Jairus' home.

This is about more than the healing of an individual. Jesus interrupts his journey to the home of the privileged to heal one of the outcasts who emerges from the crowd. Jesus responds equally to calls from the high and the lowly.

Meanwhile, Jairus is standing there, doing his best to be patient, but anxious because every second that Jesus spends talking to this woman, delays him from the most important work of getting to his daughter. While Jesus was still speaking to the woman, Jairus' worst fears came true. People arrived from his house to tell him that his daughter was dead.

If Jairus stopped to think rationally he would realize that the no more than a few minute delay had nothing to do with his daughter's death, but I doubt if he was thinking rationally at the time. Unless Jairus was a pretty

remarkable man, he probably felt some anger along with his grief, anger that this unknown woman, an outcast, delayed Jesus from getting to his daughter in time to save her.

Jesus rejects the assumption that if there is a “winner” there must also be a “loser”. Stopping to talk with the woman who had been so bold as to sneak up and touch his garment, who had taken a great risk, who had experienced the healing of her 12-year ailment, did not mean that she was the winner and Jairus’ daughter the loser.

Before Jairus could say or do anything, Jesus responded. He told Jairus not to be afraid. Out of the despair that Jairus must have felt, Jesus lives out the reality that there is always something else you can do.

I realized this one Sunday morning when I received the call that a 12-year old boy in the church I was serving would likely die before the day was over. The cystic fibrosis that had haunted his life, had been complicated by chicken pox. As I drove to the church that morning, I was thinking, I guess we have run out of miracles. As surely as I am standing here, I heard a voice say, “No, there is one more miracle, and you know what it is.” I knew the one more miracle was the miracle of eternal life and I was comforted enough to be able to face the congregation that morning, and to be able to conduct his funeral service later that week.

Jesus tells us, and told Jairus not to pay attention to the counsels of despair.

When they arrived at Jairus’ home, Jesus basically told the people who had gathered that it was “fake news” that the girl was dead. In this case, Jesus was the one with the true news. He brought the little girl, the young woman, back to life.

There are no winners or losers in God's kingdom. We are **all** adopted children. God does not cure the poor at the expense of the rich, or vice versa. With God, we all get a second chance at life, and no one has to lose.

Paul reminds us that God meets our needs, as God met the needs of the Hebrew people in the wilderness. God provided manna – the mysterious food that nourished them, - just enough for each day. As Paul encouraged the people in Corinth to help meet the needs of those who had greater need than they did, he reminded them to do this out of thankfulness and gratefulness for all that God had done for them. He reminded them that sometimes we are able to help others and sometimes we need the help of others.

That is the way that God's kingdom works – meeting our needs, whether society sees us as rich or outcast, privileged or oppressed, God always has time for us. Each of us is God's precious adopted child. Each of us can come directly to Jesus and each of us can be used by God to help bring healing and wholeness into the lives of others.