

Sermon June 27, 2021
Year B
CCM

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I came across a comment from the theologian N.T. Wright this week that I really like. Here goes:

An odd thing: was it Jesus' power that rescued the woman in today's story, or her own faith? Clearly, it was Jesus' power; but he says, "Your faith has rescued you." The answer must be that faith, though itself powerless, is the channel through which Jesus' power can work. He is no magician, doing conjuring tricks by some secret power for an amazed but uninvolved audience. He is (though onlookers don't yet realize this) God's son, the one through whom the living God is remaking Israel, humans, and the world. And faith, however much fear and trembling may accompany it, is the first sign of that remaking, that renewal, that new life."

In other words, faith is the switch that in God makes all things possible.

As N.T. Wright points out, it is important for us to remember that often in Mark's Gospel, Jesus is not out trying to find people to heal. He has no interest in making a name for himself as a healer. In fact, he often tries to discourage such talk, admonishing those who have been healed not to tell others about what they have experienced.

What happens instead, as is the case this morning for both Jairus and the woman, is that that people who are ill, or those who love them, come to Jesus. They do not passively wait to be found by him. Their faith, the faith that makes them well, is proactive. It is initiating. Their faith is risk-taking. If either the woman or Jairus had "hung back", sat on their "religion, and had allowed cultural propriety rule their hearts, then no miracles would have taken place. Instead, they actively seek Jesus with an expectant trust in this rabbi from Nazareth, truly believing that he can and will heal them and those they love.

I think we must also take note that, in the case of Jairus, there is no mention of his daughter having "faith." Indeed, death moves one beyond the realm of faith as we know it in this transitory life. But it is also hard at times for people who are ill to have faith. And it is sometimes difficult for those of us who are close to them to have faith. Sometimes, what we, or those we love, are experiencing is just too overwhelming. That, my friends, is why our faith communities are so very important. That is what intercessory prayer is all about. When one or more of us are struggling, and the end result is that our faith is faltering, we who are their sisters and brothers in Christ, are called to rally around them, to intercede and support them, as Jairus does for his daughter.

How do we do this? Quite simply, we reach out and touch Jesus on their behalf. We lift that person up in our prayers, and like Jairus, we say, "Lord, she or he whom you love is ill. We pray that you will come and make them well. Does this mean we pray quite specifically? I believe that it does. However, a word of caution. In one of the concluding prayer we use in Morning Prayer, the following is found: "Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions, as may be best for us..." Whenever we pray, either individually or a community, we must acknowledge we might not be asking what is ultimately best for us, either for others or ourselves, no matter how good our intentions are. I will never forget going to visit a dear friend, a wonderful woman, in the hospital. She was a woman of incredible faith. She had been suffering for many months with a particularly painful form of cancer. As I entered the room, several members of the church were there praying for her, for her healing and restoration. After they left, this wonderful woman turned to me, and with tears in her eyes, said to me, "How can I tell them that all I want is to be at peace and be with my Father in heaven?"

Sometimes, I think we Christians forget. Death is not defeat. Death is not the end. It is instead the moment of transition from this life to the next. Indeed, when you and I can get past our fears of the unknown, we realize that that moment serves as the ultimate moment of healing, where death and sighing are no more, but life everlasting. It is through death that Jesus Christ opens for all who have faith the gates of life everlasting.

So, when no healing of the kind we are looking for seems to be happening through the prayers of faithful people, that is usually a signal that we need to pray for guidance as to what we are called to pray for! Agnes Sanford once wrote that God uses the zeal of some people and also uses the silence and discretion of others. Again, we must be mindful that God's ways are not always our ways, nor are God's thoughts are thoughts. Ultimately, faith, as witnessed in this morning's Gospel story twice over, is about entrusting ourselves and one another to the love of God, no matter what the outcome.

Finally, it is important to note that Jesus literally throws out the mourners when their tumult and weeping turns to sarcasm and derision. It seems that, while doubt is not an obstacle to the release of God's power in this story, active unbelief is. Jesus gathers together those who are open to the grace of God and those who are actively resistant he puts outside the door. I recently came across this quote: "The temperature of the spiritual life of the church is the index of her power to heal." In other words, the ability of any Christian community to be a healing presence for its people and the communities that congregation is called to serve corresponds directly to the depth of faith present within that community. How deeply do we believe in the power of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, and made manifest in the power of the Holy Spirit in the world today? For it is in and through faith that real healing waits to be discovered. Indeed, faith will make us well.

Amen.