

June 30, 2024
Proper 8, Year B
Grace Church, Muncie
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24

Lamentations 3:21-33

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Mark 5:21-43

In the Name of the One, Holy, and Living God. Amen.

In today's Gospel, Jesus and the disciples have crossed the Sea of Galilee yet once again. This time, however, going across "to the other side" has brought them back home. When they step onto land, barely out of the boat, they are already surrounded by a great crowd.

Some are there, no doubt, merely to catch a glimpse of a famous person. I'm guessing there were some in the crowd who were more skeptical, waiting for something to go wrong. And, as Mark tells us, there were still others who were desperate for Jesus' help, and we hear two intertwined stories about healing.

First, let's think about healing for a moment. We Episcopalians have a long and uneasy relationship with the idea of healing. On the one hand we often see on parish signboards something like: "Wednesday, 7pm. Holy Communion & Healing."

On the other hand, we picture televangelists praying over people who then toss down crutches or leap out of wheelchairs, crying, "It's a miracle!" And we might cluck about it being too emotional, and probably designed to make money. We all love a miracle, don't we...so long as it behaves itself and doesn't get out of control.

But you and I are among those who believe that God can – and sometimes does – step through the boundaries of time and natural law to make something happen, so control probably isn't a reasonable expectation when talking about miracles.

The Christian tradition clearly allows for, and lifts up, places like Lourdes and Fatima, like countless 12 Step meetings, and like here, at this altar. All of these, and many more, are places where we celebrate the reversal of disease, and dis-ease, through Divine Intervention. In these places, in this place, we celebrate healing by Grace.

Whether we take notice or not, miracles of health and wholeness happen around us every day. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "Every single breath we take is a free

surprise from God. Faith does not work miracles. God does." And every miracle, she says, gives a taste of the reign of God that is to come.¹

Hear again the words attributed to Solomon:

God did not make death,
And God does not delight in the death of the living.
God created us for incorruption,
and made us in the image of God's own eternity.

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We often use the words "healing" and "curing" interchangeably. And, although the dictionary would allow this habit, I think there is a theological difference, a spiritual difference, between the two.

When we talk about curing, we generally mean being restored to some previous state, getting our old life back.

Healing is different. When we speak of healing, we must remember that we worship a glorified yet still wounded Christ. Remember with me that on the night he was raised from the dead, Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room. They were afraid, thinking they were seeing a ghost. And he told them, *Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself.* (Lk 24:39)

When we are healed, when we are made whole, we have a scar or two to show for the process. To put it another way, "curing" may take us back; "healing" can take us someplace new.

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So, after all that, let's turn to what Mark lays before us today. We have two stories, sandwiched together, the second separating the beginning and the end of the first. Although Mark doesn't set them up by saying, "The kingdom of God is like..." he might just as well have. The interweaving of these accounts feels like a parable. On one hand there's a picture of God's reign on the hoof in the ministry of Jesus. And, on the other there's a picture of our life in the world. And, with both hands, Mark throws them alongside each other for us to see.

There are four main characters: Jesus and Jairus, and two unnamed women. These four are arranged in pairs: an outsider (Jesus) and an insider (Jairus, the leader of the synagogue); the other pair: a 12-year-old girl, and a grown woman who has been terribly ill for 12 years. Mark creates spaces within and between the stories, enabling all of us to find a place that feels familiar.

¹ "The Problem with Miracles" in *Bread of Angels*.

And there's something else that feels familiar. Everyone is interrupted on their way to do something else. Nothing turns out to be exactly what was planned. How do you feel when your plans are interrupted? Frustrated? Angry? Out of control? Maybe...vulnerable?! Ah, vulnerable! Everyone's favorite feeling.

You and I don't like feeling vulnerable, realizing that we can't do much of anything on our own. Jairus and the woman differ in background and social status but, on this day, they each have run out of options, and are united in their desperation.

Jairus, a pillar of the community, pushes through the crowd and throws himself at Jesus' feet, begging Jesus to come and lay hands on his daughter, who is at the point of death. The unnamed woman, who has spent all her resources to no avail, and lives on the margins of her community, summons up the courage to push through that same crowd on the chance that she might just touch the hem of Jesus' cloak.

Jesus responds to the faith of these vulnerable and desperate people, bringing healing to their lives, because Jesus always responds to vulnerability and faith by offering healing. God did not make death. This is the regular and relentless pattern of Mark's story about Jesus: always and everywhere Jesus notices, cares for, and responds to those who are most vulnerable.

By the end of the day, despite all the interruptions, these two women, young and old, are restored to wholeness in their own bodies, and called daughters of God. Surely, they could sing with Jeremiah: *Your mercies, O Lord, are without end. Great is your faithfulness.*

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Can you see yourself within the layers of these stories? Vulnerable and helpless, yet not without hope and faith to reach out to touch Jesus' hem, that you might be healed. Healed, restored, and brought into a new place in your life in God.

Where is the hem of Jesus' cloak for you, today, in Muncie? Let me suggest a weaving metaphor. (It's not perfect; it's just a metaphor.) The long threads of the weft are held in place by the font and the altar ... and extend into the rest of God's world.

The horizontal threads of the warp are your presence and your prayers. These threads are spun by each and every one of you when we exchange the peace, when we gather in the Parish Hall, or at morning prayer, or at meetings of the Vestry and the Daughters of the King, or whenever we invite neighbors to savor and share our spaces, or whenever flowers are planted or weeds weeded, or whenever a neighbor who is hungry in body or spirit is welcomed and fed.

Warp and weft are woven together by the work of the Holy Spirit to form the hem of Jesus' cloak, right here and right now. Sometimes the weave is tight. Sometimes

it has more space. God calls us to remain firmly enfolded within this weave, looking toward the Kingdom of God, while being constantly aware of the world around us. If we can continue to live into this call, more people, more desperate people who are at end of their wits and their spirits, will see a beacon of God's love right here on the corner of Monroe and Adams, and may, by God's grace, find the hem of Jesus within their reach.

Like Christ in the crowd, this corner of Muncie can be a place of healing for those who have been marginalized by our world – God's beloved children who suffer the world's cruelty because of their race, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, family structure. The list is sinfully long.

The more fully we can manage to extend a generous invitation and welcome to a broken and hurting world, the more deeply we will live into God's mission of weaving this place of Grace, this small portion of Jesus' hem, into a place of safety, of wholeness, and of healing.

For you see, my friends, the Kingdom of God can be, the Kingdom of God is, at hand. Let us, in faith, reach out to touch its hem, for God did not make death. Amen.