

## “Why Is it that We Seek Jesus?”

Mark 5:21-43

2 July 2006, Proper 11, Year B

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### Mark 5:21-43

<sup>21</sup>When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. <sup>22</sup>Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet <sup>23</sup>and begged him repeatedly, “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.” <sup>24</sup>So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. <sup>25</sup>Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup>She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup>She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup>for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.”

<sup>29</sup>Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

<sup>30</sup>Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” <sup>31</sup>And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” <sup>32</sup>He looked all around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup>But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup>He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

<sup>35</sup>While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” <sup>36</sup>But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” <sup>37</sup>He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. <sup>38</sup>When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup>When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” <sup>40</sup>And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. <sup>41</sup>He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” <sup>42</sup>And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. <sup>43</sup>He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

### Prayer.

People of two extremes: Jarius and the un-named Hemorrhaging Woman.

Jarius was a man of wealth, influence, power. He was the leader of the Synagogue, so obviously he held considerable status and public profile. He would have been well educated, well traveled, articulate, disciplined, and astute to political and social realities.

Yet, he is humbled by his daughter's illness, sick to “the point of death.” He doesn't kneel. There wasn't time. He threw himself at the feet of Jesus and begged repeatedly. He is a desperate man and he didn't have one second to spare.

“Come, lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” Touch her with your hands.

It is a callous lack of dignity that history doesn't record the name of the Hemorrhaging Woman. Her mother loved her enough to give her a name. It is incumbent upon us to use it. I'll give her a name, just to get by for today: Henrietta Wilson (Hemorrhaging Woman = H.W. = Henrietta Wilson). It is the least we can do for her.

Henrietta is so poor ... “How poor is she?” you ask. She is so poor she can't even afford to feed or cloth herself. She spent everything she had on health care. Believe me, some of us can relate! For twelve years she's been anemic and bleeding freely. For twelve years doctors have promised a cure, taking her money, but never following through with a cure.

She has no status, other than being labeled “unclean” and, therefore, tossed out of the city on her ear, where there was no protection of the city's walls, where she was victimized by every other unclean and disadvantaged person, where she was reduced to begging from travelers who would pass by her location.

No food, no clothing, no strength, no status, no name.

“If I but touch his clothes,” she thought to herself, “I will be made well.”

It would be impossible to imagine two people more opposite than Jarius and Henrietta. Jesus couldn't have created a better setting for a parable than the one that he walked into in today's Gospel lesson.

Jarius and Henrietta come from two different worlds, yet both share the same desperation. They are both at the end of their ropes, both desperate for a cure, both seeking the touch of Jesus.

When it comes to human personality, the world hasn't changed much in two thousand years. In many respects, this is what keeps the Gospel of Jesus Christ so fresh and alive. Invariably, each of us have faced or will face similar crisis in our lives. Hospitals are full of the sickest of sick, and the obituary column is full of people whose lives have been cut way too short.

I'm currently reading an insightful book by Kevin Phillips, a former Republican strategist, titled *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Phillips carefully outlines the past two centuries of American Christianity, and how it has influenced politics and society. He observes correctly the decline over the past 60 years of the mainline denominations – Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalians – and the explosive growth of fundamentalist, evangelical communities – such as the Assemblies of God, Vineyard, Foursquare, and Souther Baptist Convention.

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This new direction is uniquely American, and it is characterized by Biblical inerrancy, personalized faith, personalized experience, personalized salvation through a “born again” experience, evangelizing new members and the apocalyptic consummation of history, return of Christ, and the end of the world. The popularity of the “Left Behind” series of books speaks volumes about this evangelical appeal.

On the other hand, old line denominations like our own value academic Biblical scholarship, individual diversity, communal identity, missional outreach to alleviate poverty, injustice, and discrimination. We value open dialog; questioning and reasoning with each other to allow people to draw their own conclusions.

Whereas the evangelical preacher will tell you what to believe, I will give you the tools to make up your own mind. Whereas the evangelical preacher will send you out to make new disciples, I am more likely to send you out to use your talents to be engaged in missions. Whereas the evangelical preacher will focus on adherence to the Law, you'll be more likely to hear a sermon about God's grace from this pulpit.

Two polar ends of the Christian spectrum, yet both seeking the touch of Jesus.

Why is it that we seek Jesus?

We seek Jesus because he is the Lord of Life. Now I know that in the presence of death it is far easier to turn to God and ask, “Why did you let this happen?” ... as if God is the Lord of Death. Just remember, it was humankind that put Jesus to death. It was God who resurrected him back to life.

If it is life that you seek – eternal life beginning right here, right now – than look no further than to Jesus Christ. Don't let the Church get in the way, with all its dogma, doctrine, tradition, and rules. You don't need an intermediately, a well intentioned priest or pope. All you need is Jesus. You don't need fear of hell or damnation to motivate you, all you need is Jesus. You don't need some fiery television preacher to guide you, simply open your Bible, turn to the Gospels, and meet Jesus personally.

Why is it that we seek Jesus?

We seek Jesus because he is the source of hope. Jesus gives the gifts and grants the vision. Who skills the surgeon's hands, gives compassion to the nurse and inquiry to the researcher? Christ, and Christ alone.

Who made it possible for Peter to preach, Constantine to change, and Augustine to think? Where do the great theologians of our day turn to for a source of hope? Bonhoeffer and Bultmann, Neibuhr and Tillich, Bart and Kung all find hope in the center of their belief, deep in the well of Jesus.

We lose hope when we fail to look outward and allow our vision to become myopic. We focus upon the incident at hand and fail to be aware of God's greater plan. We allow chaos to overwhelm us, even while we desperately attempt to maintain control, and we fail to recognize that it is all a part of God's larger kingdom and that it is God who is in control.

Without vision people perish, the Old Testament prophet observed. Without Jesus there is no hope.

Why is it that we seek Jesus?

We seek Jesus because his touch heals. I'm tired of the cynic who whines, "Where is God? Where are his miracles today?" Oh, please ... If you want a magic show, go see Penn and Teller! If you desire a cure, see your doctor! But if you want to be healed, turn to Jesus.

While healing may be about curing people, it is so much more. The word healing shares the same Greek origin as the words for salvation and wholeness. *The Book of Worship of the United Methodist Church* says it best: "Spiritual healing is God's work of offering persons balance, harmony, and wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships through confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation." It goes on to say "All healing is of God." Likewise "healing is not magic, but underlying it is the great mystery of God's love."<sup>i</sup>

I know the touch of Jesus heals because I witness it just about every day. I mentioned in "This Week at Zion!" this past week that I had the privilege to sit down with a man, deep into Alzheimer's disease, with language skills profoundly impaired, and we carried on a conversation together. He told me all about his bakery he owned in Niagara Falls. He told me about his wife, his family, and his dog. And he told me about his military service.

I know the touch of Jesus heals when one so feels the need for prayer that they call the prayer line, or call me, and ask to be included in the prayers of our congregation or in my personal prayers. I know Jesus heals when I witness doors open and opportunities knock, in some circumstances, and doors close or barriers pop up, in other cases.

The question isn't whether or not Jesus heals. The question is whether or not we are aware of it.

Believe me, I've seen and heard all the excuses for not seeking Jesus.

Too often we seek Jesus as a last resort. We turn to others, our friends and our families. We try to come to our own conclusions or uncover our own answers. We expect to buy our way out of a jam. We expect the doctor to give us the answer we so desperately

want. We expect our lifetime of building status and influence in the community should amount to something.

Too often we seek Jesus to cover all our bases. I recently heard the famous columnist, Art Buckwald tell Diane Rhems from his hospice bed this strategy. You've heard it before, "I'll do a little Jewish thing and light a Menorah, pray to Mohammad once or twice, say a few 'Hail Mary's' for the priest, even claim Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. Someone has to help me!"

Too often we seek Jesus to justify our sinful actions and neglect. I hear regrets all the time that are yearning for Jesus' intervention: "I should have gone to visit more often." "I should have said something to my son or daughter about the dangers of drinking and driving." "I should have never let television be my babysitter." All the while, the un-observant still believes that it all about them. They seek justification without true repentance.

Too often we take our place right beside Peter and deny that we've ever known him.

Why is it that we seek Jesus?

We seek Jesus because he is the Lord of Life. He is the source of life. He is the sustainer of Life. And He is the ultimate goal of life. We seek Jesus because he is the source of hope. Without him, hope is lost. But with Christ, we have the sure hope and expectation of salvation beginning right here, right now. Finally, we seek Jesus because his touch heals. It can resurrect the dead just as easily as it can repair and restore broken relationships.

My beloved, come to the table this morning, seeking Jesus, seeking the life that he offers, seeking the hope only he can give, seeking his touch – his healing touch – that you, too, might be made whole once again.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me this day. Thanks be to God. Amen.

i The Book of Worship of The United Methodist Church, pg. 613.