

“Have Faith and Believe”

Sermon thoughts by Rev. Mark Schowalter

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Scripture text: Mark 5:21-45

A story within a story is the best way to begin seeking insights into these two healing events as recorded in the gospel of Mark. These two healing events are the last two healings by Jesus in Mark's narrative. Why one story inside another? A woman bleeding for twelve years... and a little 12-year-old girl? One is near death and dies before Jesus gets there... the woman has been bleeding for as long as the little girl has been alive. Is there significance to the writer's lifting up the number 12? I understand some scholars tend to believe it is a message to the Jewish nation, the twelve tribes of Israel under Roman authority. I tend to believe it expresses the chasm, the societal distance between the two. The woman is shunned from the community because of her affliction, shunned by the temple authority whose livelihood is to maintain the law. Yet the temple authority is now risking his livelihood seeking out help from this radical itinerant healer/preacher whom the temple is quite concerned about. One is on the low end of society, the other in the upper ranks. So, my friends... fasten your seat-belts and tighten the strap of your crash helmets... there's about to be a collision!

Relationships. Relationships are created, sustained, maintained based on faith and belief. You go to a doctor believing they can make you well. If successful you continue with that doctor because you believe in them, you have faith in them. It's a simple faith and belief formula. Friendships, marriages, service work on appliances and cars... the list is endless, just about any kind of relationship needs belief and faith. We might also substitute trust into the formula for faith. And in these two stories there is a tremendous amount of belief, faith, trust going on. The bleeding woman believes, trusts Jesus can heal her. The temple authority believes, trusts Jesus can cure, can heal his daughter. They are both headed for Jesus from different places yet for the same reason... to create a relationship with the one known as the Christ to find wholeness and wellness. Here comes the crash and Jesus is in the middle!

You know where this story goes. The bleeding woman touches Jesus' garment is healed. Jesus says, “daughter, your faith has made you well.” The little girl lives. Jesus tells her father... probably her mother, family, friends as well... “do not be afraid... believe!” And how many times have we heard that in our life's journeys. “Don't be afraid... believe!” And you come through a life's crisis realizing it has been your faith all along which heals you, makes you well and whole. I believe it is as much a part of living as it is to take each breath. That's why I keep my crash helmet close by! [put on helmet]

I take relationships seriously! I'm always in the process of making new relationships on this fantastic journey call life. Sometimes I'm colliding with someone at Jesus, we're coming from opposite directions. We both receive what we are looking for from Christ... and get something so much more... a new relationship! It might be as simple as sharing a common interest/hobby such as sailing. It might be so diverse as a heated debate over immigration, nationalistic policies, acceptance of others whom I might

not fully understand. Yet in the beauty of Christ... we do find relationship. We find common ground on which to begin and continue trusting one another and maintaining a relationship. I believe this embodies the second greatest commandment of what God expects of us... to love one another just as God loves us."

So, what becomes the real issue in this story... in our stories? I believe it is the human need for survival... to be loved and able to love... to not be isolated and/or alone. This is risky business! In these scriptures we find the woman risking getting caught and severely punished for breaking the law. She was shunned by the community. It was against the law to be in the presence of others. It was against the law to touch a male Jewish man... let alone talk with him in public. Jairus was risking his livelihood. To be seen in public talking, requesting, begging from the itinerant healer to come and save his sick daughter meant risking everything. Then he sees the exchange between the woman and Jesus... which is not only unlawful... but it is delaying Jesus getting to his daughter. Life is risky! At times riskier than we'd like to think.

Here is where I believe we need to have faith and believe. When I consider some of the risks you and I face each day... it often gets risky in the choices we must make. For example, to talk with someone from the opposing side to an issue you strongly believe in. That's risky! We constantly hear of people shouting down others with opposing view-points... opposing opinions... and not allowing the other to speak is risky! It is difficult to have faith and believe. We hear of story after story of people facing fatal diseases, being struck down by severe injuries, life's existence challenged by oppressive policies threatening one's survival... and it is difficult to have faith and believe. And yes! My sisters and brothers... that's why I'm wearing my helmet! Because somewhere along the way there's going to be a collision! A collision with Jesus when I either need to touch him and be healed... or I need him to come and save me, save my family member or friend. It's risky! It's tough and difficult! Yet to meet Jesus in a personal relationship is wholeness and wellness... and life. And where there is life, there is love... for God is life and love. Amen.