

**Sermon. June 27, 2021; Pentecost 5, Proper 8, Year B**  
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In the life of the Christian community, we preachers seek to nourish the human soul.

Our subject, the Christian faith, is ancient, our method - rather old fashioned, our time and place, postmodern.

And so we are keenly aware of the great cultural divide between our world and the world of Jesus; between our world and the writers of the New Testament. This cultural divide makes our task challenging.

Undaunted, we preachers seek to present all human experience as meaningful, especially human suffering; a meaningfulness informed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Finally, we preachers also accept the challenge of assisting people of faith to live in a world of flesh and blood, of joy and suffering, of life and death. We often end up preaching unawares, to people whose experience of the world challenges their faith, but also preach in a world that we believe is being renewed and transformed into God's new Kingdom.

A particular task of the preacher is to demonstrate how the stories of Jesus, interconnect with our own time and culture, despite the great distance and difference that exists between them.

This task is particularly challenging as we reflect together on the New Testament miracles.

Now, as we reflect on the miracles found in Scripture, we may lean into our early Christian formation, and strive to remain what has been called a "true believer".

If this view proves difficult, we may struggle with our childhood formation, and embrace an inward desire to be a believer who wants to learn more about the meaning of these miracle stories, then we learned in Sunday School, if indeed we happen to have attended a Sunday School in our youth at all.

It is important that you be aware that your two assisting priests, Fr. George, and me, provide a ministry in a healthcare setting. We daily face patients with catastrophic illness or who have lost loved ones. We exercise an end-of-life ministry, in which there is no miracle, no cure available. You can imagine the questions we receive, and how we might struggle in responding. "Where is God in this, and why me?"

The writer of the Gospel of Mark shares two miracle stories this morning. They are stories about women and womanhood, about the meaning of their lives, and their physical and emotional potential for new life.

First, we meet a 12-year-old girl, an age when in the culture of the Middle East, young women marry, who is thus about to enter womanhood and the potential for new birth, but who is gravely ill. She is the daughter of Jairus, a Jewish leader.

There is some question about whether the girl will survive to grow into a time when her flow of blood will bring the promise of new life. We also meet another woman whose flow of blood is bleeding her life away. There is a profound correspondence between these two stories.

So, the question the Gospel presents us this morning is whether these two women will enter the fullness that their lives has the potential to offer. Will there be a married future and family for the girl, and will the woman ever have a life worth living? Do the lives of these two women really matter?

In these stories, indeed in all the stories found in the Scriptures, it's the details that bring the story to life and reveal its' deep truths and unexpected grace.

We can discover those moments in the lives of those we encounter in the Scriptures, and also in those we encounter in our own time, by observing how people respond to one another, the way they engage in conversation, how they touch one another, and how deeply they listen to one another. This is true in the interactions between people in the two miracle stories, and no doubt in our own relationships as well.

The relationships we meet in Gospel this morning share some of these important characteristics. The father is desperate to save his daughter, so much so that he bucks the community's resistance to Jesus and bravely seeks him out. The woman who is hemorrhaging, who is literally bleeding her life away, is equally desperate, and pushes against the norms for female behavior. Both she and Jairus, press against what is traditionally allowed.

It does not take too much of an imagination to feel Jairus's impatience and fear, a man of significance; when Jesus interrupts his journey on the way to minister to his dying daughter, to engage an impure woman of no consequence, of no station and status. We can also feel, the rudeness and dismissal of the disciples. We can feel the woman's acceptance of this repetitive rejection. It simply washes over her, as she tenaciously reaches out for the dusty hem of a healer's robe.

We can feel the determination of this women, when she decides to push forward and simply touch that hem. Just that act, she says to herself, will be enough. And so it is.

In Mark, interestingly, the woman heals herself, by showing her faith in Jesus, by her sheer tenaciousness. And Jesus abruptly turns away from the serious task of attending to Jairus's daughter, asks who touched him, and engages the woman who did. We can feel the irritation of the disciples as they hear Jesus's question about who touched him in the midst of a pressing crowd, and towards the woman as she causes him to redirect his attention.

As we pay close attention to the behavior of the characters in these stories, we see, in them, something of ourselves. Their behavior speaks volumes about who they are, and who we are, as we sort through who we most identify with in the story.

The defeated and panicky Jairus, the failed humanity of the disciples, the sheer determination of the woman, and the unexpected, salvific and grace filled response of Jesus in his action of paying

attention to her. This is a story of hope for women - and for men a story of helplessness and repentance!

Following the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage Jesus moves on to the young girl, but arrives too late. The girl has died, and all seems lost. We can certainly imagine ourselves into Jairus's grief, and also into his anger.

Before Jesus enters the house Jesus turns to the panicking Jairus and asks him not to fear, but only believe. When he arrives, Jesus dismisses everyone except the immediate family, enters the bedroom and simply invites the young girl to rise, and rise she does.

These two stories, beg to be heard as one. The girl, who is about to bleed and the woman who is bleeding have their future restored. The stories, while centered on a cure, speak more profoundly about a healing that goes beyond any kind of medical miracle. The promise of new life.

What is good for us to remember at this juncture, is that everyone Jesus heals, this girl, this woman, finally dies. Death is lamentably real. Indeed, Jesus himself enters fully into our humanity and submits to his own death. This stark truth should move us to think differently about the healing miracles, and the deep miracle to which they emphatically point. We are invited to integrate the meaning of these two miracles into our lives, lives filled with spiritual the challenges, of sickness and pain, of fear and doubt, but also of faith and hope, and the victory of life over death.

We are always invited to go deeper, and more fully appreciate the gifts these stories seek to offer us. The meaning of these stories lies less in the miracles themselves, and more in what these stories celebrate, the deep human promise, desire and yearning for new life, and how Jesus personally responds to this fundamental longing. [Author Bvolck]  
(<https://ekkesiaproject.org/blog/author/bvolck/>)

We ought not to worry about our struggle to grasp the exact reality of the miracles. The disciples themselves, misunderstood them completely, especially as the disciples are portrayed in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus assumes this misunderstanding as he cautions his followers to tell no one about what has happened.

What the writer of Mark is getting at, it seems to me, is that the true significance of the miracles is not yet immediately apparent and will ultimately find their meaning in the events of Easter Day and its promise of new life. That meaning awaits the events of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, when the last enemy is finally overcome.

Our human frailty and the reality of suffering and death, confronts us with the truth that Jesus is no "cosmic fixer", for those who suffer and die. In life, it is in the experience of our own suffering, and the suffering of those we love, that we encounter the suffering of Jesus himself, and his healing power, who while not always providing a cure, opens us up to the experience of suffering as a possibility for transformation, for eventual healing if not a cure. The Christian faith has always born witness to us that there is a particular kind of union with God amid suffering and

turmoil, if we are willing to reach out in the faith that God is one with us in the suffering itself, even unto death.

The Christian response to suffering I believe, is to courageously attend to our own suffering, and the suffering of others, and remain present as empathically as we can, seeking to do our best to invite the suffering Christ into the experience, in the knowledge that he has been here before us. We will need to remember his pain and fear, and work with his grace to accept our own.

All of us fall short in this kind of attending, this kind of healing. All that is required is to remain present to ourselves, to one another, and to the presence of the healing power of the Spirit, that is not always about providing a cure. We can also practice a sense of *momenti mori*, that we are all mortal, but that we can die into the risen life of Christ, into a promise to which all the miracles in Scripture most emphatically point, resting in a faith that Christ will do whatever is necessary, a necessity that is blessedly outside our control.