

## Proper 8 Year B

“And he took her by the hand and said to her little girl get up.”

Over my life time I have been privileged to witness the empowerment of women in American culture:....the passage of the nineteenth amendment to the American Constitution granting them the right to vote....well, I didn't actually witness that....I wasn't around...but certainly we have all seen what that liberating piece of legislation has meant for our culture....the political landscape has never been the same since...and then the availability of birth control which liberated another generation of women that would have real choices about how they might live their lives...an incredible gift....and then women could get a first rate education, a precinct previously owned by men... and women have continued to make their way up the socio-economic ladder...now doctors, lawyers, CEO's...and women elected to formidable positions in government...and in the church....women on vestries; women elected deputies to general convention...women in 1976, approved for ordination to the priesthood; and then women bishops, apostolic leaders in our church....the voice of the feminine has and continues to transform our church, our culture and dare I say potentially... our world....all the aforesaid occupations nearly impossible to attain just fifty years ago....we're not there, but we're getting there....But sadly this project, this movement is limited, with few exceptions, only to a shrinking first world...the world of privilege....the world of the powerful....the world of the educated....the world of the elite....In the rest of the world, the exponentially growing so-called two thirds world, we are witnessing the growing abasement of and violence to women....we see it in Mexico, most poignantly in Juarez, in Guatemala, in North and South Sudan and in Somalia; in China, in Myanmar; in Iran, in Syria and Afghanistan...the list goes on....even in the ghettos of our own back yard in America, violence against and abasement of women proliferate....and as the world becomes more and more interdependent and related, we no longer have the luxury of averting our eyes.

Three years ago I preached on this same gospel reading in Mark...the occasion being Proper 8 Year B in the lectionary cycle, which is always Mark 5: 21-43....and during that week of preparing the sermon, the now quelled insurgency in Iran was in full swing (seems like many years ago... how soon we forget)...I still remember poignantly a young woman; her name was Neda Agah-Soltan...I remember her lying in a pool of blood killed piteously by the brutal military regime....she had become the symbol of all abased women around the world; on sketchy cell phone transmissions

from the streets of Tehran...one could see placards reading: “Remember Neda”...and I thought of our protagonist in this passage from Mark ...this woman with the twelve year issue of blood....and in her culture that would have made her ritually unclean...an outcast of society like so many women who live on the margins of proper human existence in our world today.

But she would dare through hopeful faith to touch Jesus the healer, a man... in public, no less, and speak to him in public...all taboos of her world...crossing the boundaries of decorum just to live a life of dignity.... and she is healed....and then in Mark’s rapid fire pace we come to the synagogue leader’s home and there Jesus calms the tumultuous household, just as he calmed the sea a chapter before, and raises the little girl from the dead....The woman with the hemorrhaging uterus and the little girl become one protagonist...Mark’s rhetoric conflates the two...the listener would hear that the issue of blood was *twelve years*...the little girl is *twelve years* of age...the woman is called *daughter* by Jesus...the girl is Jairus’ *daughter*....so the rhetoric compels us to see this as one healing, one transformation, taking on mythic proportions...and many scholars point to the politically incorrect and countercultural nature of this narrative.... unclean women...one bleeding from her uterus and the other dead...both ritually unclean in this culture and therefore outcast...scholars make the point that this is the radically good news of Jesus’ ministry...that even the unclean and outcast are restored to community and therefore to dignity....the little girl and her co-protagonist are told to stand...and as you all know by now the word for stand comes from the root word for resurrection .... resurrection which at its heart in scripture means to stand with dignity... unclean womanhood reclaimed and empowered to stand with dignity, to stand in the light of resurrection....to stand healed and whole...to stand with fecund potential...where before there was only disease and death, and hopelessness.

Now this passage makes for and has made for decades a great feminist sermon...a sermon about the empowerment of women, up and against thousands of years of the abuse of patriarchy....and I think that this passage still speaks powerfully to us in that regard today...in fact isn’t it fascinating that during the present day phenomenon dubbed the Arab Spring...in every case, in each country of the Middle East...at the top of the lists of the protesters demands.... are the rights of women...food, clothing, shelter, education, equality and dignity...salvation in short.

And our words from Mark the Evangelist speak passionately about honoring these of lower cast in his world....bidding the faithful to grant them a place to stand with dignity...but I want to suggest that these words

mean much more:....much more in a world wherein powerlessness is not just limited to women, but for the vast many...So I want to offer another slant on this text....We hear that the woman suffers literally from a flow of blood....and then moments later we hear that the power that healed her had gone forth from Jesus (he could even feel it)...but in the Greek in both instances, the flow of blood and the power gone forth.... the word is flow... perhaps a metaphor ...FLOW, movement, the very aesthetic of Mark's flowing narrative ...the way the universe flows into being, in strings of matter and energy, a flow of infinite change and transformation, never static, always becoming....and here we are told of the sickened flow of blood, and the flow of death....and then facing that, the flow of empowerment and the flow of life....This bleeding woman, this dead girl are the staunch representatives of all the abased and powerless of our world...just as Mary, the mother of Jesus, represents the abased and powerless of our world....and in her radical song we so politely call the Magnificat...she claims that the kingdom of God will bring a new order, ....that the kingdom of God will have no such way of things....that the flow of goodness shall prevail.

For Mark power will flow from the divine as it ever has, and will empower the powerless....power will flow from the divine and will heal and restore the disenfranchised to their rightful status in the human community... the rightful status of living in freedom, and nonviolence, health, and agency (agency meaning having the power to change things, to be in the flow) and last but not least in dignity....these rudiments of the commonweal of God are synonyms for salvation...salvation perhaps a word grown tired and wooden in our modern world in the common parlance...but in Mark's world salvation is afire with meaning...It means most of all among many synonyms, well-being; salvation is empowerment to rise above being what the liberation theologians call the non-person....salvation flows from God through us the faithful, through all people of conscience....It flows, ever on the move to stop the bleeding in our world and raise the dead to life.

We, as the body of Christ, good people of God, are the ones who bear such saving power...and it must flow from us, from our very garments into our world and raise to the promised life of resurrection the least of us....the power of God must flow from us and transfuse with life the bleeding and the dead among us....Remember Neda, and her kin....remember those who bleed and sleep in death... because it is for us brothers and sisters to say to the unsaved, the non-persons, the ones who live on the outskirts of life itself, a life of indignity...It is for us to say...little girl stand up, and it is for us to give her something to eat, nourishment for the way ahead....and know that

in her standing, fecund potential enters the world yet again, the new creation nearer still to its birth....Remember Neda...remember this little girl...the woman on the corner of Government and George...for salvation afire is at stake...for them....for us.