

Pent6_Prop9_YrB_062815_mcr
All Saints Episcopal Church

Today's Gospel lesson could be called a narrative sandwich - it is a story within a story. Remember from last week that Jesus had told his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Well, now they are there - on the other side. But whatever solitude Jesus might have been seeking is not to be. The crowds have followed them around the shore and are waiting there to see and here more from this amazing person.

So the story begins with a man named Jairus - a desperate father - weaving his way through the crowd to get to Jesus and ask him to come and heal his critically ill daughter. It has taken all he can do to get close enough to Jesus to implore him to help; he is fraught with emotion.

In the meantime, someone else is trying to get through the crowd to touch Jesus. It is a woman who has been ill for twelve long years with chronic bleeding. She believes that if she can just touch his cloak, she will be healed.

Remember how crowded it is. Think downtown at Mardi Gras. People are jostling each other, pushing to get around and past each other, all of them reaching out - not for beads and moon pies - but in order to touch Jesus. And in the midst of a hundred grasping hands, Jesus feels a connection with one hand in particular. A powerful connection. And he asks, "Who touched me?"

The disciples say, "Are you kidding? Who touched you? Everyone has a hand out!" But Jesus looks all around to see who has done it. And the woman, who knows that the bleeding has stopped as soon as she touches the cloak, and that she is finally well, comes forward to kneel at his feet and tell him the whole story.

And Jesus says to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

And now, the other side of the sandwich: people from Jairus' household hurriedly come to Jairus, panting with the news, "Don't bother to trouble the teacher any further. Your daughter is dead." Jesus overhears them and says to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." And he goes with Jairus to the house,

taking only Peter, James and John with him, and they find another crowd, but not so large, of people weeping and wailing.

Jesus tells them they don't need to make such a commotion because the child is sleeping; she is not dead. And everybody laughs at him.

Now these aren't the first people to scoff at what God is doing. Remember Abraham and Sarah? They both laughed when God promised that they would have a child in their very old age and become the forbearers of a great family. They knew it wasn't possible from their point of view.

The mourners at Jairus' house know about death. They know that death is an all-too frequent intruder in the homes of the old and the young. This girl is dead. What can Jesus do about it? But with God, all things are possible, and that is just what happens. Jesus takes the parents and the 3 disciples into the child's room, takes the girl by the hand, and tells her to get up. And she does!

Now you might be wondering why this is called a narrative sandwich when the inside story (the woman with chronic bleeding) and the outside story don't seem to have any connection to each other. But Mark adds one more thought: the little girl was 12 years old. Wait, the woman had been bleeding for 12 years. Could there really be a connection? And we start looking for more.

Jesus calls the woman, who would have been considered unclean, 'daughter.' By touching him, the woman would have spread her uncleanness to Jesus. When Jesus takes the dead girl - the daughter of Jairus - by the hand, he would have made himself unclean. But by being willing to touch and be touched, he does not become unclean, but makes both of them clean again, restoring them to abundant life. The two women in need become daughters of God.

The number twelve, in addition to bringing to mind the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 disciples, is a number of abundance. It is a sign that there is abundant life in Jesus. Jesus not only brings this abundant life to the women on the lakeshore, but to all the world. At the end, those who doubted and those who laughed are left with their mouths hanging open.

Mark wakes us up to the presence of the abundant healing grace of God in Jesus.. In him, there is hope, healing, life and community for all. Meanwhile, we are like the disciples, who tried to keep the children away from Jesus; we are like the disciples who didn't want to share their food with the hungry crowd for fear of not having enough for themselves. We are stingy with what God gives so lavishly. We worry about who deserves our help, our food, our time, our money and our attention. We carefully calculate the conditions under which we will be willing to forgive someone. But then, when we least expect it, the Holy Spirit slips in quietly behind us and pours out a river of grace! It's a darn good thing that God didn't ask whether we deserved the grace before sending the Son to save us, and the Holy Spirit to knock some sense into us!

When we experience the abundance of God's grace, we can't help but take Jesus seriously. Through the Son, God transforms our dismissive laughter into tears of joy, our skepticism into speechless amazement. And when it does happen - we know what it is to be made whole!

We can shake our heads in disbelief, but look at what has happened just this week: governors and other officials in places long the bastion of racial discrimination and violence have begun taking down the symbol of that hatred that has waived over us for 150 years! Conversations are springing up all over the place about what we can all do to make things better for those who suffer discrimination and prejudice! And marriage - marriage is now just... marriage, no matter who is getting married to whom! Love wins! And yesterday, in the House of Bishops at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, a Black man, the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, was elected as the 27th Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, the first African American person to hold this position!

God does indeed bless us with abundance! We thank you, O God, for your healing love and life-giving presence. Amen.