**June 28, 2015 – 5th Sunday after Pentecost**

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Today’s Gospel story of two very different healings is just bursting with emotions. There is desperate hope, fear and trembling, grief, and even derision. And there in the middle of it, at the eye of this emotional hurricane, is Jesus. Like last week, he is the calm in the storm.

Two people from opposite ends of the social spectrum – a woman alone and desperately ill, an insignificant, invisible member of the crowd; and a powerful leader of the synagogue and presumably the community, a married family man, as is proper for someone of his standing – both of these people approach Jesus in their own ways to seek healing.

And both of them risk something. The woman is mostly likely a social outcast because of her affliction. The text tells us that she has spent all of her money on physicians, trying to find a cure, but to no avail, so she’s now poor as well. And she’s alone in the crowd – either a widow or someone who wasn’t able to be married because of her disease, or maybe even cast off by a husband – at any rate, she’s without family or support. Yet she risks what little she has left and pushes through the crowd toward Jesus.

“He won’t want to touch me,” she thinks, “but if I can just get close enough to touch his robe I know I’ll be cured.”

And Jairus also risks a lot to seek a cure for his gravely ill daughter. He was very near the top of the food chain in Jewish society – he’s a leader of the synagogue and in high standing in the community, and most likely wealthy. He can have anything he wants, but the one thing he wants most – his daughter to be cured – he can’t buy with money or influence. But this Jesus has been making waves around Galilee, and most likely enemies, too, among the Pharisees and scribes.

“I don’t care what the Pharisees think,” Jairus thinks, “If this man can cure my daughter, all the trouble will be worth it.”

So the stage is set for our dramatic story to unfold. Jairus gets to Jesus first. He probably didn’t have to fight his way through the huge crowd around Jesus – money and influence have a way of greasing the wheels – but he doesn’t take his status for granted as creating a command performance. Instead, he humbles himself and falls on his face before Jesus to beg for his daughter’s life. Here he takes yet another risk, since by lowering himself so, his position in the community could be seriously compromised.

Jesus agrees and off they go, with the huge crowd in tow, or rather pressing all around him. With that mysterious attraction that large crowds cause, I can imagine it getting bigger and bigger as they walk along, which of course slowed them down. And somewhere along the way, they picked up one more pathetic creature – the hemorrhaging woman. I can see her sidling in from a back alley with her head and face covered to avoid recognition. With her intent to touch Jesus’ robe, she would have to work her way through the crowd carefully so she’s not noticed and so she’s not crushed by the mob. But she had to catch him before he got to Jairus’ house and went inside, or her opportunity would be lost at least for that day.

If I can just touch his robe, she thinks, this will all be worth it.

And, just as she knew would happen, she touches his garment and instantly feels the healing power surge through her. But what happens next was NOT on her radar. Jesus stops. He stops and looks for her. What should she do? She can hardly run, not with all that crowd around her. And besides, she owed him the truth. So, swallowing her fear but still shaking like a leaf, she, like Jairus, falls down before Jesus and confesses that it was she who had touched him.

And then, rather than chide her for interrupting him when he was on an important mission, Jesus does something even more extraordinary. Though the text doesn’t say, I can’t imagine Jesus just leaving her there on the ground. I see the crowd backing away from her after seeing who she is, and Jesus stepping into the suddenly vacated space and gently raising her to her feet again. Then, and maybe this is the most amazing thing of all, he restores her to society. He has healed her physically, but he also heals her spiritually. By naming her “Daughter” he gives her a family. By touching her, he acknowledges that she is clean in God’s sight. He does more than make her well – he makes her whole.

But what about Jairus all this time? This delay in their already slow progress must have both galled him and terrified him. His daughter was at death’s door! What if they got there too late? And what if, by escorting Jesus to his house himself, he missed the chance to say goodbye and to tell her he loved her one last time?

And sure enough, that’s what happened. While Jesus is still speaking to the woman, some people come running from his house to tell him that it’s too late, she’s gone. And, perhaps as a means of damage control to extricate him from this embarrassing Nazarene, they also suggest that Jesus’ services might be dispensed with.

But Jesus overhears them and then, ignoring them and the crowd, says to Jairus alone, “Do not fear; only believe,” and heads off to the house as if nothing had happened. And once there, he faces the mourners, whose weeping and wailing turns to snide laughter. The Greek word “*katagelaó*” doesn’t mean a pleasant laugh. It means to ridicule, or as the Psalms are fond of putting it, to laugh someone to scorn. Maybe there was some shadenfreude there – Jairus had lorded his position over them and now he’s taken down a peg by falling for this obvious charlatan. Or maybe they were just laughing at Jesus himself for thinking he could actually raise someone from the dead. The very idea!

Mark says they were all amazed, but that is a bit of an understatement, I’m sure. I imagine jaws were on the floor when the daughter came strolling out, but all Jesus says to them is to get her something to eat. It’s pretty comical, really.

And there our passage ends. We’ve been taking on quite a journey, with all the elements of great cinema – drama, a cast of thousands, an emotional roller coaster, a touch of comedy, miracles, and redemption. Cecil B. DeMille would be proud!

But other than a good yarn, what does this passage give us? At the very base there is fear and faith. “Do not fear; only believe,” Jesus tells us, just as he tells Jairus. Where there is faith there is health and life, and where there is fear there is disease and death.

I’m not talking about normal fear here, like fear of bears. Fear of bears is natural, or fear of tornadoes, or, for some people, spiders, and acting on that fear, like running away, is a good thing. This is part of our survival mechanism and necessary, sometimes.

But debilitating, incapacitating fears are something else. And it’s something that we face every day in our culture. Some of these are carefully cultivated and encouraged by the advertising industry:

* If you don’t buy our clothes, cars, deodorant, purses, watches, etc., etc., no one will love you and your line will die out
* If you don’t buy our food, diet products, exercise equipment, no one will love you and your line will die out
* If you quit this horrible job where you are abused and belittled, you will never get another job and no one will love you and your line will die out

You get the picture. And if you don’t think that’s what advertisers are selling you, I’ve got a nice bridge I can let go for cheap…

And some fears are also carefully cultivated by politicians and power brokers:

* THOSE people are just out to take what they can and live off of our hard earned money
* THOSE people are trying to destroy our way of life and take away our freedom
* THOSE people want to kill us all

And then there are those existential fears that keep us up at night:

* Am I a good person? A good parent? A good Christian?
* What happens when we die?

Fear is so completely woven through our lives that it seems impossible to get away from it. How can we live our lives without being touched by the fear that’s in the very air we breathe?

“Do not fear: only believe.”

“Only believe.”

Believing, like love, is an active verb. It’s something that we can do in the face of fear. And, like the hemorrhaging woman, believing can give us courage to take other actions and to face those fears head on. This might be splitting hairs because in Greek faith and believing are really the same word in different forms, but somehow saying, “I believe,” builds up our faith.

*I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life*

We’ll say those words together in a minute, as we do every Sunday, to affirm our faith together – to BUILD our faith. Faith that might seem far away comes closer with every “I believe….” Faith that seems to be almost extinguished springs back to life with every “I believe….” Let those words strengthen your faith as you say them today, and let them sustain you throughout your life.

Let your believing strengthen your faith, and let your faith make you whole.

“Have no fear; only believe.”

Amen.