

“What Jesus Sees”

Mark 5: 21-43

Lewinsville Presbyterian Church

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In his sermon last Sunday, Pastor Scott asked us to consider whose interest conventional wisdom serves and to consider God’s willingness to subvert conventional wisdom and deliver God’s surprises. If conventional wisdom would suggest that the David’s of the world don’t stand a chance against the Goliaths, then it would also suggest that the needs of the unnamed woman who had been suffering for twelve years don’t stand a chance against the needs of Jairus, the leader – mentioned four separate times so you can’t miss it – of the synagogue. If it was necessary to prioritize, the sure bet would be to choose based on status, a recognizable name, wealth and social class, access to resources – of people, place, and power.

But the gospel story today is different, there is no direct competition or confrontation between Jairus and the woman for Jesus’ attention, even though we wonder – and we have to wonder because the bible doesn’t tell us just what Jairus thought about the woman, during the delay in which his daughter died. David and Goliath’s story is a different kind of set-up, a confrontation with an outcome where the one who is left standing is not the one you expect.

In today’s story there are two left standing that you really would not expect, a woman made well, sent away in peace and freed from her long suffering, and a little girl, only 12-years-old, who had just been lying down dead. And these both come to pass because first, a man of privilege and tragedy and faith comes and falls at Jesus feet for his sick daughter to be made well, and as verse 24 says, “so Jesus went with him.” Then a woman of suffering and hope and faith touches Jesus to be made well, and as verse 32 says, “Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.”

Jesus isn’t seeing only the people who are most seen in that town, which is a subversive surprise of the Gospel, and comfort to those who relate to this unnamed woman of long suffering, of long trying, of going backwards and getting worse despite her all efforts in the other direction. But he is also seeing Jairus and his pain and as there is no Lazarus story in the gospel of Mark, this girl is it – the example of the power that Jesus will have to raise from the dead, the amazement of those in the room, the same Greek word that describes the women fleeing the empty tomb at the end of Mark’s Gospel. Jesus letting us see a glimpse of all that he has come to do, for himself and for us, in the life of this girl. Unexpected.

From these twenty two verses, split pretty evenly between the story of Jairus and his daughter and the woman, we get a pretty good idea of all that Jesus has come to do for us, and

it is all grounded on the same word – Greek *sozo* – to save, translated twice here – to be made well, Jairus asks –for his daughter “so that she may be made well” and the woman thinks to herself, “I will be made well” And each of them, from their encounter with Jesus, receives a saving wellness. But neither of them receives it in the way they may have hoped they would. The woman has to wait twelve years and exhaust all her resources. Jairus has to hear the words, - “your daughter is dead.” The girl has to go through death, and the community’s grief, and hold that miraculous, but mighty strange, story in her family and town. We are familiar with how saving wellness often comes to us in ways we don’t expect and not in the way we hoped it would. I, like I imagine you have, have seen some things that I believe were miracles, when hope and healing come together, and I, like I imagine you have, have wept over miracles that didn’t come, little girls that didn’t get up, women who only got worse and then worse. But we have also seen people, maybe experienced ourselves, who were made well by Jesus even when a hoped for healing didn’t come, who experienced the saving power of Jesus through forgiveness, from sin, from the paralyzing hold of regret, in relationships renewed, or who saw the light of Christ as a companion in trauma and tragedy, who found strength beyond what they knew themselves to have and were upheld in the peace that surpasses understanding. And those can feel every bit like a miracle when they come. Like Jesus has seen us in our need and cares for us, even when there may be more important people – leader of a synagogue or urgent – daughter dying vs. a chronic condition – or concerns for him to attend to. I don’t know if the woman reaches out to touch his cloak, seemingly hoping to be unnoticed, because she knows where Jesus is headed, an urgent need of an important person. But when he stops to see her, and then draws out her story too, it gives us courage to think that our whole truth matters to Jesus too, even when we are so used to dismissing it.

A common thing I hear from people in my work, maybe some of you, that I talk to, is a version of the line, “but I don’t have it that bad really.” This was especially true in the pandemic, where people were suffering emotionally, from loss, grief, mental challenge, brain fog, malaise, languishing, even depression, anxiety, but always added the caveat, “but compared to others I am doing fine. I’ve said that too, and those words for you and me are often from a place of real gratitude. For our resources, support, friendships and especially for this church and how we care for each other here. But sometimes it is because we have a hard time seeing our needs as a priority, for ourselves and then especially for Jesus. It’s like we are afraid that if we take up Jesus time, with whatever pain or suffering we are managing – if she had this for twelve years, she was managing it in some way - then someone else’s little girl will die.

But if we just keep managing the places of our suffering because we aren’t sure we are worthy of the wellness Jesus offers, or maybe we are afraid to ask for it, maybe ultimately because we are afraid of being disappointed if we don’t receive it as we expect, then we are not open for Jesus bringing a saving wellness to us that we can’t even see yet, but he can. It often doesn’t come exactly as we hoped it would, so we need Jesus to help us see it.

One other thing happens with both Jairus and the woman for them to receive what Jesus gives, and that is their proximity to him. Jairus asks, come and lay your hands on her, and

the woman thinks to herself, if I but touch his clothes. A connection between Jesus touch and their deliverance, salvation, healing, being made well, and more than a connection, a requirement, that in order to receive what Jesus gives you need to be close enough to him, within the reach of an outstretched arm.

My first question during Bible Study was – if you knew nothing else about Jesus and heard this passage – what would you learn about him? And the first response was that he has power.

Jesus is powerful enough to see and respond to all manner of need, urgent and chronic, from the most “well known” celebrity on this planet to the least. Which means that we don’t need to imagine that Jesus keeps a priority chart and rank ourselves on it, where our needs don’t stand a chance. He is just more powerful than our needing to compete for him to notice us, or to feel like we are only deserving of his partial attention, that we need to sneak up on him for what we need and leave before he notices. Those are the kind of lies that leave us nothing but lost and broken-hearted. So blow those away. *Springsteen *Promised Land* reference

The second response was that Jesus has compassion. Jesus cares about what is hard in your life and he wants you to be close to him, to trust him with your truth. In Bible study we wondered –what exactly did she say, when she told him the whole truth? What was her whole truth? What is yours? What is the combination of pain and belief, suffering and hope that you hold right now? Maybe even together, what is it for our congregation?

Jesus wants to hear the whole truth of you and us together, Sharing Your story, what is hard and what you hope, Our story, what is hard and what we hope. Then, draw from his power as you walk through those hard and hopeful things. To believe and be comforted in your fear. To hear him call you daughter, little girl, beloved child. Jesus is not a zero sum game, where caring for you means caring less for someone else. His power combined with his compassion mean that there is abundant love and saving wellness for us all, and for our church, and our country, and our world. Not always as we expect or hope, but the closer we stay to him, and that is church work, the closer we **as in all of us**, stay to him, the more likely we are able to see what he sees, and receive what he gives.