

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last Sunday, our gospel reading ended with the direct question of the disciples, in the face of the calming of the seas by Jesus issuing a command, causing them to wonder, “Who then, is this?” Hopefully, we get drawn into asking that same question, and wondering further who he means to us.

Today we have a marvelous narrative device so characteristic of Mark: two separate miracle stories....a woman healed and a young girl raised from the dead...and both are played out in point/counterpoint conversation with one another. The effect is to magnify the impact of the stories and at the same time to focus the issue of healing (actually salvation) and faith which literally accompany the actions of Jesus.

The story sets us among the crowds alongside the sea and, without transition, a leader of the synagogue arrives. He falls at the feet of Jesus and “begs him repeatedly” (which is the language that exactly repeats that of the demon, Legion, in the previous story) for the life of his “dear little daughter”, that she may “*be saved and live!*”. At this point, we are told that, without a word of response, Jesus “went with him” and with the large crowd continuing to press on him, yet we have every reason to expect a successful outcome. After all, the prayer is right; the purpose is worthy; the prospect of healing and life secured.

But “now” there is this woman! An impatient interruption! She not only interrupts the narrative as well as our expectations, but our patience also gets strained because of the additional and comparatively lengthy narrative of her medical history. Yet she, too...even in her silence....joins the pleas of the father in anticipation of the “salvation” she seeks. “If only I but touch, I will be made well”. Jesus gets distracted. He gets accusatory, seeking for the one “who touched me”.

It seems that Jesus gets aggravated, perhaps because he does not get to act in the ways that he normally wants as the two-fold “immediacy” of the narrative will not allow the power that flows from Jesus and the effectiveness of the healing to be disguised.

Anyway, Jesus may not know “who” touched him, but the woman certainly knows “why.” In fear and trembling, she falls down before Jesus and confesses the truth of what has happened to her. She had hoped for healing, but her hopes were far too small. The fear and illness that have defined her life still have their grip on her.

But this is the way of the good news of the gospel. Now, the words of Jesus endow her with more than she could ever have imagined. She is no longer just “a woman” in the narrative, but now is claimed as a “daughter,” one whose “faith” has “made her well”, rather “saved” her. Now words and a promise have been added to the new reality in her life. She receives the benediction of Jesus

that invites her to leave in “peace” (*shalom*). And, almost as an afterthought by the way, she receives the confirmation that she has been healed of her disease.

Do not miss the emphasis of the action and its order of sequence: First, she is “saved” by her faith, and second, again as almost an afterthought, she is healed of her physical disease.

But the story is not yet over. In mid-sentence, while Jesus is still mouthing his benediction on the woman’s faith, people arrive to say that the daughter of the leader had died...the first to ask before this jump-the-line woman with her own problems.

In the same instant, the hopes of one person have soared; but another’s have been dashed to pieces. One has been claimed as a daughter, while another’s daughter has been lost. Faith is clearly at risk. The people put it so clearly, “Why even trouble the teacher any further?” What hope is left?

But Jesus’ words will not let the dashed hopes and fears remain unchecked. “Do not fear, only believe,” he says at Mark 5:36. It is only here in Mark, and in the parallel reading in Luke 8:50, that two options are juxtaposed so clearly in the New Testament.

Once again, his words call attention to the thin line between fear and faith, but a better translation would also serve to underscore the point. The phrase “Do not fear, only believe” fails to represent what Jesus really is saying to the leader and to us. If the command is “do not fear,” then it is already too late, and does not address the reality for this leader or for ourselves. The problem is that, so often, we are already consumed by fear and the prospect of faith remains too distant.

It should rather be read as something like “Stop being afraid,” and “Go on living by faith.” Through the present tense of both verbs, our attention is called to the transforming power of God to change our lives from fear to trust...a transformation in which the prospect of life and salvation now appears in a wholly new dimension.

So now comes the rest of our story, one would pray. From the word of promise by Jesus, and with the prospect of transformation from fear to faith as good as done, it remains for the rest of the story simply to fill in the details. We read them as ones who hold our breath with just a touch of delight as we follow the working out of what we already know to be the outcome. We should smile as we oversee the weeping and moaning; we may chuckle or wink knowingly at the misplaced laughter of the crowds who do not know what we know. And our hearts are drawn when Jesus takes the little girl by the hand and commands her “Arise”, a word that verbally anticipates another resurrection. We applaud the crowd in their amazement at what has just happened, especially since it matches our own amazement and wonder at these two stories in which faith and salvation and healing have met together in the presence and power of this Jesus.

But we also are left with just a bit of wonder. Certainly we are invited to continue to ask just where this story intends to lead us. What will it be like to follow this Jesus on the journey of discipleship? In what way will our lives be transformed by this One whose words call us to “stop

being afraid” and instead to “live by trust” in the promise of the good news of God’s kingdom among us?

Will Jesus find us also in the crowd, and will he suddenly turn, and look at either you or me and ask loudly, “Who touched my clothes?”

The key moment in this story? Then...and now for us?

Jesus has the strength of unshakable faith in God the Father. Unshakable faith. A faith that makes him unique among all other persons in recorded history as according to our Judeo-Christian faith tradition.

And yet the scriptures within the gospel of Mark are consistent in telling the story of the ministry of Jesus from the perspective of reaction.

The power of Jesus, glorifying God the Father through the Holy Spirit, comes to him in the performance of these miracles...as a result of the expressions of others in faith.

He reacts. He always reacts. Out there on the road, he always looks for...and then seizes...the slightest opportunities to react, and redirect the focus.

He reacts...in power...in assertiveness...to the prayer of others.

It is **their** faith...that gets it done. Whatever it is.

It is the prayer of Jairus...**his prayer**...**his** statement of faith...voiced as a cry to help heal his daughter...that gives Jesus the platform to act.

It is the act of the woman...**her** touching his clothes, as an act of faith...that opens up the opportunity taken by Jesus. The opportunity to proclaim, to the crowd, that she had been healed by God because of her faith.

What is it about Jesus that is unique?

Nothing. Other than his relationship and his faith in God the Father, nothing at all.

In this season of the church following the Pentecost....it is for us to come into the realization of the power we have, as a church of God, by virtue of the Holy Spirit being with us and among us.

It is for us...to start to figure out what we also can do...if we only dare to look within, and trust the words of Jesus spoken to Jairus: “Do not fear. Only believe.”

It is for us....that we, as a church of God, might dare to put our faith to the test.

It is time....for us to call on God in following right behind Jesus.

It is time, actually it is more likely overdue....in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.