

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

“Now there was a woman

who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.

She had endured much under many physicians,

and had spent all that she had;

and she was no better, but rather grew worse.”

Is it just me, or does it feel like we have an editing problem with this encounter.

At face value

it would seem that this is just an interruption to the narrative.

Some however,

see the woman with the hemorrhage as the actual cause of the girl's death;

Jesus is delayed and so because of that the girl dies.

We also have the whole business of the power flowing through the cloak

that smacks of some kind of magic more than God's grace,

so you can see why the original lectionary folks just left this part out.

BUT,

Any time we are tempted to ignore a part of scripture

because it makes us uncomfortable,

or doesn't line up with our world view,

is a time to step back and examine our motives carefully.

Very carefully.

This little story,

though an interruption,

is, I have come to believe, a crucial interruption.

It is crucial to understanding the whole story,

and indeed the whole mission of Christ.

And since that mission is now our mission,

it is crucial for us to hear as well.

Our examination must first begin with a brief discussion of blood,
to be specific, menstrual blood,
in its first century context.

Judaic law proscribes that a woman during the time of her period
and for seven days thereafter
was “ritually unclean,” and may not return to the temple,
or much of everyday life for that matter,
until she had been ritually cleansed.

Anything she touched
or wore
or sat on
during this time became ritually unclean as well,
and so, also required ritual cleansing.

Try and imagine the emotional and spiritual state
of a woman who had been ritually unclean for twelve straight years.

It is no small wonder that she had spent all that she had
to try and alleviate her illness.

And still she grew worse.

Imagine as well the strength of will
and purpose
and faith
that it took for her to move into
and through
that pressing crowd
to get to Jesus.

Her only hope lay in anonymity.

Having received her gift of healing,
she was slinking away into the crowd

only to hear the voice of Jesus calling above the racket.

“Who touched my clothes?”

She knows what she has done.

With our modern sensibilities we might not realize what she has done,
but she has lived with this reality for twelve years.

Her touch has made her Savior ritually unclean,
or so she believes.

It would have been so easy to get away in that crowd,
to disappear into the mass of humanity.

But she does not.

Having been healed,

she returns, courage undaunted, to be saved.

The free gift of God’s grace compels her to act,
to move herself back into community.

Her actions remind us of a great truth.

Grace comes first; without merit or constraint.

We do not earn grace; it is given to us.

But,

grace received places demands on us.

The love of Christ compels us to action.

By his own actions,

Christ has given us the example of how we are to behave.

It is an example that also pervades the entirety of our lessons today.

It is generosity not based on worth.

It is hospitality not based on class.

It is community not based on geography.

It is the Kingdom of God revealed.

But what of Jairus?

What part does Jairus play in the Kingdom?

Jairus is a man grabbing for straws.

When one of the leaders of the synagogue,

goes to a man already being ostracized from the community of faith
for his disregard for the Sabbath laws,

this shows us that Jairus has truly come to the end of his rope.

Any parent with a sick child knows what that feels like,

knows that no stone will be left unturned when seeking a cure.

Even the stone rejected by the builder
may have some merit.

And so Jesus is presented with an opportunity

to get back in the good graces of the faith community.

But that is not what Jesus' ministry is about.

And so in the midst of his journey to the house of Jairus,
he stops,

And he turns back,

so that a woman who is sick may be healed,

so a woman who is lost may be saved,

So a woman shunned may be returned
to the love and support of community.

And yet, a child dies.

Christ responds to this knowledge with, "Do not fear, only believe,"

and without even waiting for a response,

continues on his way to the home of Jairus.

By his actions we see

that it is NOT that the woman had more worth than the child,

it is that we all have worth.

Black, Brown, Yellow, Red, or White; we all have worth.

Male, Female, LGBTQ or Straight; we all have worth.

In God's eyes we ALL have worth.

Jesus Christ did not come to this world just to save the Jews,
or the Christians,
or any SINGLE group we might like to name.

He died on the cross for the sins of the whole world.

Whether we believe or not is irrelevant.

Irrelevant, that is, to God's saving action,
but not to our reaction.

Our belief demands action.

Indeed our belief can even raise the dead,
giving new life to our actions and our lives,
and through us to the world around us.

St. Paul shared with the community of believers in Corinth,
a community that was struggling with its faith,
how the power of God's grace can move a community beyond itself.

Just before the section of Paul's letter that we heard this morning,
he tells them of the churches of Macedonia,
who even in the midst of their own affliction

“voluntarily gave according to their means,
and even beyond their means,”

begging for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints.

That doesn't sound like any kind of stewardship campaign I have ever heard of.

People voluntarily begging to give beyond their means?

Luckily, the church didn't pick up on THIS as the Biblical standard of giving
and decided to stay with the tithe,

the first ten percent of our income,

but it is something to think about.

Imagine a faith and a mission so compelling

that it would have people begging to be a part of it.

We know what that is like.

We have experienced it.

Sadly it is all too often disasters that bring it out of us.

I was not here for the flood or the tornado,

but I have no doubt

that we experienced an outpouring of generosity here at Grace.

Generosity of spirit, of thanksgiving, of help, and of money.

And then it faded as it so often does.

But, the Gospel today gives us hope nonetheless.

Whether we come as Jairus,

or whether we come as the woman in the crowd

the message to us is the same.

“Do not fear, only believe.”

The power of Christ is coming to us!

It may feel like Christ has been delayed,

but it does not really matter in the end.

The power and love of Christ is coming to us.

It is always coming to us.

And when it arrives our fears will evaporate like the morning fog.

Then we will see with fresh eyes

the gifts of God’s grace in our own lives,

and the love of Christ will empower us to respond as we should.

The words of Christ to that little girl

speak to our hearts across the ages,

“Talitha cum,” Little girl, get up!

It is time for *us* to rise.

All of us!

Amen.