“How Dare We!”

Rev. Debra McGuire

Bethany Presbyterian Church

Mark 5:21-43

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***21When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 22Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.”***

***24So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. 26She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” 29Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” 31And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” 32He looked all around to see who had done it. 33But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”***

***35While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” 36But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” 37He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 38When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” 40And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” 42And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.***

My first cat, Boo, was a rescue from a 14th floor stairwell in a building near my seminary. As a one year old kitten, she came with me to my new home after graduation. She became ill though in her first year, and wouldn’t eat and was listless for a long time. I took her to the vet and they ran many many tests, and gave me medicine to treat her, that was torture for both the cat and myself to get her to swallow. She stayed at the vet for one week, during which time I would visit her. She had these cute little front paws shaved from her little wrists or elbows (?) Where she was given iv fluids during her stay. They couldn’t find anything wrong, nor could they make her well, and she was declining fast. I would go to visit her every day and just hold her for a while. But she was miserable and sad and sick. So with a heavy heart, I agreed with the medical staff, to put her down. But I was determined that I was going to hold her the whole time.

When I went to the vet that last day. the assistant brought my kitty to me, in someone’s old flannel shirt, and said she’d be back with the doctor. So I waited, and I cuddled my little girl Boo. I waited longer in that same waiting room, for the doctor to come, but no one came. I waited and waited. And waited. Should I remind them I’m here? I was passively waiting thinking the ball was in their court. I just had to wait. But then, in a flash of realization, I just took my kitty in that old flannel shirt, and walked out of the vet’s office, and went home.

I told I told Boo that I wasn’t going to put her through any more tests, she wouldn’t have to struggle with any more needles, and I wasn’t going to try to force her to eat any medicine anymore, and I would just love her and let nature take its course. I stayed as close to her as she would let me, all day long. A long time friend came over and sat with my kitty and I. My friend is interested in all kinds of healing work, including Reiki, an ancient technique used for stress reduction and relaxation and has been shown to have many benefits. It is a gentle, non-invasive therapy that involves the practitioner gently placing their hands on or near the body. My friend who came over had done this kind of work with animals before and the animals she worked with had been responsive.

So she came over to see what she could do. My friend on the floor where my cat was lying and slowly began to approach my cat, sitting closer and closer, letting the cat sniff her, and eventually the cat let my friend touch her with her hands. After maybe an hour of just sitting together, my cat let out this yelp, and sprung up and tore to the other side of the apartment! My friend said she certainly felt something from the cat, and the cat – well, the cat lived 12 more years! I never found out what it was, I didn’t ask.

I think of that miracle of mine that day with my friend and my cat when I hear about the woman in today’s story who was made well by touching Jesus’ cloak – and Jesus feeling something leave him when she touched the cloak. A far cry from the woman’s experience with Jesus, still, it’s the only experience I have that even comes close to experiencing first hand, the tangible power of healing effects.

Remember last week, Jesus crossed the sea to the region outside of Jewish territory, when they ran into a storm that Jesus was able to command into stillness, showing his power over creation and nature, as the God of all creation. While there on the other side, in the country of Geresenes Jesus healed a man who was possessed by a demon, demonstrating that his message is for the world, not just Jews of the time. In the text for us this morning, Jesus has just crossed the sea again, returning to Jewish territory, to portray another kind of power. This time the power is over life itself, and portrays the power of faith.

The two healings in this story have much in common, at the same time that they are very different. Both healing stories refer to twelve years – the twelve years of the woman suffering, and the age of Jairus’ daughter. Both victims of illness are female, and are ritually unclean. – the woman because of her hemorrhage, and the daughter’s death would have made anyone in contact with her also ritually unclean. Both situations were dire. Both are regarded as daughters. Both would have been less highly regarded socially (a female child, and an ill woman). And both were restored as a result of touch. Their differences in social status would have given them different access to any assistance. As a temple leader, Jairus and his family would have been surrounded by community, and likely had access to anything medical or ritual. The woman though would have been a social outcast and not had her own community, and suffering for 12 years would have likely gone through any resources she had.

Just as Jesus spread his word and healing to the Geresenes on the other side of the sea, Jesus attends to the needs of both of the individuals in today’s story, always expanding access to his power, beyond social and geographical boundaries. The ill woman as well as the daughter of a temple leader were both worthy of Jesus’ actions. We can only wonder what was going through the minds of both Jairus, and the woman in the crowd. How many social barriers they must have had to cross to reach out to Jesus in the first place. Jairus falling at Jesus’ feet, and the woman unclean as she was touching all of those people in the crowd as she pushed past them to get close to Jesus. How audacious! How dare they!

This is all good news, especially on this Pride Sunday at Bethany, when we specifically celebrate others who have been made invisible by society. The gay community, the LGBTQ+ community is not the only group who society has had trouble with as a whole. But celebrating Pride today, especially in the Church, is an important way to be a part of the expansion of access to Christ’s love and God’s love that Jesus started. It is an important way to speak against the closed doors of the Church, that many of our siblings have experienced.

In June of 1969, a NY gay bar called the Stonewall Inn was raided by the police and the clientele of the bar fought back. It was not the first raid of a gay bar, but it received much media attention. One year later, on June 28, 1970, to commemorate the Stonewall Uprising, the first Pride marches were held in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, including what was called a “Gay-In” in San Francisco on June 27th. Thousands of LGBT+ people gathered to commemorate Stonewall and demonstrate for equal rights.1 Today, NY is home to the largest Pride celebration, welcoming 2 million LGBTQ+ persons and allies.

How dare that woman push through the crowd and touch the hem of Jesus’ cloak. How dare LGBTQ+ insist that the church welcome them and celebrate them. How dare anyone who has ever been made invisible or less than, reach out for the love of God!

The better question is, how dare the Church close its doors to anyone. How dare society add barriers to equal access, anywhere. You and I must be just as audacious, and dare to be the love of Christ, to all.

Amen.

1The Library of Congress, History of Pride <https://www.loc.gov/ghe/cascade/index.html?appid=90dcc35abb714a24914c68c9654adb67>

<https://www.christiancentury.org/sunday-s-coming/ordinary-13b-roth>