

Episcopal Church of the Resurrection  
Centerville, Utah

June 28, 2009  
The Rev. Steven C. Andersen

YEAR B, PROPER 08  
2 Samuel 1:1,17-27, Psalm 130, 2 Corinthians 8:7-15, Mark 5:21-43

### A SIMPLE FAITH

Today's gospel reading is presented in what is sometimes referred to as a "sandwich construction." It begins with one story, then is interrupted by the insertion of a second story. After the second story is finished, the first story is picked up and concluded. Both of today's stories are dramatic, life or death situations. The situation for the hemorrhaging woman is desperate and dire. For twelve long years, her life's blood, literally, had been flowing out of her body. There were of course no transfusions, nor any way to adequately replace her waning supply of blood. She would have been incredibly weak and anemic, drained of her life's energy. To make matters worse, she had at this point, been drained of all of her money, spent in a long, increasingly desperate search for a cure. So on one rail of her life, she has this long, tortuous, incremental decline in her health. And on the parallel track, she would seek, find, and try, one failed cure after another. And each time, she would cycle through the hope, the waiting and the disappointment. The toll on her spirit, would have been every bit as devastating, as the draining of her physical life, also one drop at a time. It is hard to imagine that it could be any worse for her than this. But it was. The coup d' gris, is that in her culture, her hemorrhaging would have also made her

ritually unclean. Other than the doctors whom she paid to spend time with her, she would have been ostracized, outcast and shunned. Not only did she suffer so greatly, but she did so abandoned, in shame, and in loneliness.

The situation of the young daughter of Jairus was certainly no better. Granted, there is nothing that tells us that she had been long suffering. But at the age of twelve years old, she was either dead, or a whisper away from dead. And this outer part of our sandwich stories is probably more about Jairus than his daughter. His situation would have been entirely different from that of the hemorrhaging woman. A respected leader of the synagogue, he would have been a good and respected man, with friends and family. His life would have been full, successful and satisfying. Except for one little thing. All that he had, including a presumably devout religious life, was no barrier to devastating tragedy. In the middle of a good and full life, his young daughter was dying. Helpless and powerless, there was nothing he could do, but watch his child die. His bitter grief and broken-heartedness, undoubtedly rivaled that of the hemorrhaging woman. I can imagine nothing more tragic than the death of a child – the death of your child.

We often talk about the natural ups and downs that we experience in life. We all know, that for whatever reason, things both bad and good, seem to happen at random. It has always been that way. Intellectually, we know that we are not exempt from tragedy and the pain, the suffering and the grief, that life

may have in store for us. But it is out of our fear of these possibilities, which causes us to so fervently pray that we be spared from the time of trial. That we not be forced to drink from the dark cup that may be given to us. Please God please, don't let this be true. Some of us will indeed face the worst things that can happen in life. And all of us, during the course of our lives, will get a serving or two, of those things that tear our hearts, wound our souls, and rob the color and joy from our lives.

And so, on the same day, in these two stories, both Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman find themselves in the same position. They were in the worst of situations, out of alternatives, out of choices, and out of time. Having exercised every reasonable and practical option, they placed their final hope in the only option left. They sought Jesus. Jairus was a proud man, a religious leader among his people. But there was no pride or posturing on the part of Jairus. In the midst of a large crowd, Jairus, in simple and complete humility, without reservation, or any sense of self-consciousness, fell at the feet of Jesus, and begged for his daughter's life. The hemorrhaging woman was too discarded and too marginalized to even approach Jesus. In her near invisibility, she was bold in just sneaking close enough to touch the fringe of Jesus clothes.

And both received a miracle healing, at the touch of Jesus. Jesus cured what was incurable, and brought to life what was dead. And it seems that there are two things, or at least two things to be learned from these stories. These

stories are about faith, and about the power of God. Faith is important in the teachings of Jesus. In today's gospel, Jesus tells the hemorrhaging woman, that her faith is what has made her well. He implies the same to Jairus, telling him not to fear, but that he only needs to believe. But we are not healed by faith alone. Or really at all. We are healed by God. If healing, even miraculous healing, was a matter of faith alone, it would become a consumer transaction. Pony up enough faith and receive your miracle. Not enough faith? Sorry, no healing for you. It reduces God to a sales clerk behind the miracle counter. Miracles and healing, are ultimately and always, the sole province of Almighty God, and God alone.

But maybe that points us to the best kind of faith to have – a faith that simply says, that all things are in God's hands. A beloved friend of mine from many years in a book group, often said that she translated faith as trust. And I've always quite liked that. Faith is putting your trust in God. That simple, and that open. As I read today's gospel stories of miraculous healings, I don't know that I would have had the faith, that Jesus would have cured my incurable disease. I do not know if I would have had the faith that Jesus could bring my dead child back to life. I just don't know. And honestly? I pray that I never have to try to summon that kind of faith. What if I failed? Would the consequence of my lack of faith be the denial of God's healing?

It is okay to ask God for a miracle. And we should always have faith that

anything is possible – God is in charge, not us. But we should always remember that specific results – or miracles - are not a prize earned for having the proper faith. Nor are specific outcomes the judgment of a capricious God.

I have always been stymied by the notion that if I had the faith of a mustard seed, that I could move mountains. Jesus said it, and I know that I am supposed to believe it. The trouble is, that I have yet to move any mountains. As my wife will tell you, I barely move the vacuum cleaner. So what am I left to conclude, other than I must not have any faith, not even the smallest amount? Somehow, that doesn't seem right. But here is the faith that I can have. And maybe it is the faith that Jesus speaks of so often. I have faith that there is a God, a God great enough that all things are in his hands. Including me. Including you. And including all the needs and cares of the world. I know that there are some things that I have been entrusted with. But more, I know that there is a whole creation full of things that I neither control nor understand. The kind of faith I seek, is to trust God completely and absolutely, relinquishing my presumption of control. I want to place it all, every bit of it, in God's hands; my concerns and my fears, my hopes and my dreams. In this faith, we will always find healing. Amen.