

June 28, 2015

Mark 5:21-43

Everyone Has a Name

Pastor Sally May

Mark 5:21-43 from The Message (MSG)

After Jesus crossed over by boat, a large crowd met him at the seaside. One of the meeting-place leaders named Jairus came. When he saw Jesus, he fell to his knees, beside himself as he begged, “My dear daughter is at death’s door. Come and lay hands on her so she will get well and live.” Jesus went with him, the whole crowd tagging along, pushing and jostling him.

A woman who had suffered a condition of hemorrhaging for twelve years—a long succession of physicians had treated her, and treated her badly, taking all her money and leaving her worse off than before—had heard about Jesus. She slipped in from behind and touched his robe. She was thinking to herself, “If I can put a finger on his robe, I can get well.” The moment she did it, the flow of blood dried up. She could feel the change and knew her plague was over and done with.

At the same moment, Jesus felt energy discharging from him. He turned around to the crowd and asked, “Who touched my robe?” His disciples said, “What are you talking about? With this crowd pushing and jostling you, you’re asking, ‘Who touched me?’ Dozens have touched you!” But he went on asking, looking around to see who had done it. The woman, knowing what had happened, knowing she was the one, stepped up in fear and trembling, knelt before him, and gave him the whole story. Jesus said to her, “Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you’re healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague.”

While he was still talking, some people came from the leader’s house and told him, “Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher any more?” Jesus overheard what they were talking about and said to the leader, “Don’t listen to them; just trust me.”

He permitted no one to go in with him except Peter, James, and John. They entered the leader’s house and pushed their way through the gossips looking for a story and neighbors bringing in casseroles. Jesus was abrupt: “Why all this busybody grief and gossip? This child isn’t dead; she’s sleeping.” Provoked to sarcasm, they told him he didn’t know what he was talking about.

But when he had sent them all out, he took the child’s father and mother, along with his companions, and entered the child’s room. He clasped the girl’s hand and said, “*Talitha koum*,” which means, “Little girl, get up.” At that, she was up and walking around! This girl was twelve years of age. They, of course, were all beside themselves with joy. He gave them strict orders that no one was to know what had taken place in that room. Then he said, “Give her something to eat.”

KATIE:

In an unforgettable week filled with laughter, tears, love and caring, the six of us managed to have a good time and do service for others. One of our speakers said two things at the end of our talk that really hit home for me, first he said "You will touch somebody while you are here, your time is the most valuable thing you can give a person. Your being here will change someone's life". This really made me think about the impact of our YETS trips, and this was driven home by the changes that had taken place at the Russell School. From the stories told, I could tell that their entire program had taken a sharp turn for the better. All because of the extreme effort and time of their amazing principal. The other thing that our speaker said is "It's not what I did today, it's what I can do tomorrow." For me this was the real message and theme of our trip this year. This trip made memories that will never fade and I am very grateful for the opportunity.

AMY:

I think the person who made the strongest impression for me is Mary from Common Art.

I absolutely loved watching how she navigated various situations and conversations. She was invariably kind, thoughtful, and so clearly focused on the person she was talking to. She had concrete and specific suggestions to help us prepare for the program, and great questions and reflections to help us debrief afterwards. When she needed the group's attention, she would call out "Beloved!!"and then go on to say whatever she needed to. The lovely piece is that "beloved" isn't just a word for her to use - that feeling shines so clearly from her in all of her interactions with clients, staff, and volunteers.

JAKE:

The thing that stuck out the most for me was our last day, when we visited the Boston Rescue Mission. It struck me that most of the people we were working with went through the drug and alcohol program themselves, and were now donating their time to prepare meals with us. It was empowering, because I realized that some of the people we're serving meals to now, may in two years still be sober and volunteering. As I look back, this was the case at many of the sites we went to. It meant a lot for me to see these programs worked, and no matter how bleak things may seem, there are always success stories.

Lucy: The June 2015 YETS Trip was meaningful, challenging and joyful.. . there are many great stories to share.

There are two experiences that I want to particularly lift up for you.

- One occurred well into the summer solstice worship service of Church of the Woods... in the woods.... of Canterbury, New Hampshire. The Priest, Steve Blackmer was leading the initial portion of

communion when through the woods came two women. One with flowing grey hair and a summer hat... holding the arm of the second woman and guiding her steps through the woods to join our group. Steve laughed and greeted the women inviting them to join us and saying something to indicate that they often arrived at this point in the worship service. Katherine flipped her long grey hair over her shoulder and guided her sister around to meet each person – by this time it was clear to all that her sister – in addition to having mobility challenges- was deaf and blind. The messages of devotion, love, patience and perseverance were clear.

- The second occurred when we arrived at Old South Church, UCC on Thursday evening for the Jazz Worship Service only to learn what the world already knew – but we did not know - about the tragic events that had unfolded in South Carolina the night before... there... within the stone walls of the Chapel of the historic church we sang the anthem that you sang this morning and we listened as the soloist sang “What the World Needs Now is Love Sweet Love.”

And indeed it does.

BLAIR:

This year our group embarked on a trip to Boston to focus on urban poverty and individual dignity. We had opportunities to engage in service, have meaningful and thought provoking conversation, and to have fun and explore Boston.

Common art proved to be the most memorable and engaging service project that I participated in. I found that I learned a lot from the staff, volunteers, and participants. During the day I helped them prepare some materials for an upcoming event and had the opportunity to sit down with the clients and do some art. I was apprehensive a bit this aspect for two reasons. Firstly I can be quite introverted when I'm with new people and I wasn't sure exactly what I would say to them. Secondly, I am not a very good visual artist. Once I came to that part of my day I sat down with my pencil, eraser, and paper and began to draw. What I found as the afternoon wore on was that the art provided a commonality between me and the clients. As I chatted with people we looked at each other's work and it naturally fostered a common language. I enjoyed listening to people's stories, and getting some perspective on who they are and why they were at common art. I spoke with one woman for nearly an hour. We bonded over our mutual love of ballet. She asked me to look at her portfolio and write a short review for her. I feel blessed that I was able to meet her.

I had the opportunity to engage in so many meaningful conversations throughout the trip. From hearing peoples story, to talking to the staff in the programs, to having wonderful conversations each evening with the group.

Being able to hear people's stories is an amazing thing. It gives you perspective on the person and in this context the issue of homelessness. Hearing people's stories during this trip helped to de-stigmatize homelessness and break down a lot of stereotypes that I have learned about homeless people. Homeless people, are people first and homeless second. Their housing situation does not define them. The staff that work in these programs are amazing. They dedicate their lives to helping others and doing God's work. I loved being able to hear their perspectives and insights on the issue of homelessness. Finally I had some wonderful conversations with my peers and the adults on the trip. I was able to discuss what I saw, ask questions, and be reflective. One conversation went from face painting, to discipline practices in schools, to how to teach about race. All of these conversations were thought provoking and contributed to the experience.

Finally, this trip was so much fun! We explored Boston; taking the T, hanging out in the park, and wandering Newberry street. We also spent some time at the beach in Quincy. We were able to see two beautiful sunsets and one beautiful sunrise from that beach. In the evenings when we had downtime after worship we always played games. This routine started the first night and carried on throughout the week. The week began with laughter as we played 4 rounds of catch phrase kids verses adults. Some of the groups' inside jokes for the week came from the first night's game. But the laughter didn't only come from the games. Like I mentioned earlier we had lots of inside jokes and took on each new experience from a perspective of having fun together as a group. Having that much fun and laughter on the trip really helped to balance the challenges that we faced through the work that we were doing.

Overall this was the best YETS trip that I've ever been on. I had an amazing time and learned a lot. I want to thank the congregation for their support of this program.

Today's scripture reading is the gospel reading to be read when one is following the lectionary. On first reading I questioned what connections there might be between this story of the miraculous healing of two females and the experience the six of us on the YETS trip in Boston. However, Blair's, Katie's, Jake's, Amy's, and Lucy's reflections are so full of hope, love, compassion, and service that I now see many connections.

The theme of this service trip was "Faith in Action: Urban Poverty & Individual Dignity." We saw a lot of poverty and we witnessed a lot of respect for individual dignity. Today's gospel reading is also about poverty and individual dignity. Before the religious leader's daughter could be healed, resurrected, the woman in the streets had to be healed.

It is also about fear and trust. As it is written, "The woman, knowing what had happened, knowing she was the one, stepped up in fear and trembling, knelt before him, and gave him the whole story. This woman was afraid that she would be chastised, scolded, rejected by Jesus for touching his robe. How many homeless people, how many with addictions do you think are afraid that they have no value, no right to personal dignity? And how many are not given that dignity? But Jesus tells the woman it is her faith that has made her well; he values her as worthy of healing ~ and as the reflections so beautifully portrayed – we saw examples of people valuing people ~ offering them safe spaces, places to be and share their creativity, offerings of quality education and respect for the children, places that offer amazing food and warm, caring shelter. Just as the woman on the street was healed before the daughter of the religious leader – so too we experienced where the first – those who have – will be last and the last – those who do not have – the homeless, those with addictions, the mentally ill, the dominantly black and brown children living in Dorchester, the largest AND poorest neighborhood of Boston – the last will be first. Everywhere we served – Common Art, the Russell School, Boston Rescue Mission – in all the places those deemed last, in society's eyes and minds, are put first.

That neither female is named in Mark's story stands out to me. We do not know their names. What our YETS experience reinforced for me, for us, is that everyone has a name. When we do not know someone's name, just as when we do not know their story, it is so much easier to marginalize, discriminate, oppress, ignore. Chris, Jake, Bryant, Mabel, Sam, Sally, Angus, Steve, Lucy, Mary, Ken, Batman, Blair, Mark, Katie, Dennis, Amy, Carlos, Rob, Nancy, Ferris, Joanne, Ron, Steve, Chelsea, Mark. These are the names of a few – they include clients, employees at the sights, organizers and leaders, worship leaders, and yes, us. Through our service we are connected in some way to all with whom we meet. I don't remember all the names of the people I met. In fact, I spoke with a homeless man for approximately 1 ½ hours on the sidewalk outside Common Art – I never did learn his name. Yet, as Amy reflected, everyone, in the eyes of God, has a name. And that name is Beloved.

I will always remember this intelligent, interesting person I met on the streets of Boston as “beloved.” So when you see someone and don’t know their name, whether you are passing them on the street as they beg for food or shelter, or you hear a story of a nameless person who has overdosed on heroin, remember they do have a name. Everyone has a name.

The final connection between our YETS experience and today’s text is the occurrence of miracles. Jesus heals a woman who has been hemorrhaging – bleeding heavily – for 12 years – she had tried everything society offered to be made well and had no success. I can’t help but think that when she touched the hem of Jesus’ robe how desperate she must have felt. And the 12 year old girl is raised from the dead amidst and despite the doubts and sarcasm of the people all around her – a miracle indeed.

I think about all the people who are desperate, who live life on the margins. We met and served many desperate people. Some have themselves been raised from the dead as they continue on the road to recovery from addiction while serving others who are in places from whence they came. It is too prominent and too easy in our 21st century thinking to think, to believe that we can take care of ourselves, and that the good, or the bad, in our lives is the result of something we have done. So then it is up to us to fix what is broken, and when a body or a life is too broken there is nothing we can do or offer. We, like the crowds, don’t believe in miracles.

Our week in Boston showed me that miracles happen every day. It is a miracle every time someone with an addiction, like the woman who touched Jesus’ robe, reaches out for help, every time a mentally ill person seeks and is provided professional help and a community of support, every time a homeless person obtains permanent housing, every time a homeless person is invited to share their artistic gifts. In Dorchester, every time a child is treated with respect and dignity, sadly but truthfully, it is a miracle. It is a miracle every time an unnamed human being, a child of God, is named, by us, “beloved.” The value of community can never be underestimated.

We, as a community of faith, have amazing opportunities to perform miracles in our offering of community and service.

There are so many good people doing amazing work. A question asked on the trip – How do we bring this home? How do we make manifest in Burlington what we experienced in Boston?

May we all have the faith to believe in miracles, to trust that all deserve and can be healed; to believe that all life is valuable and has inherent dignity, and that everyone has a name and is beloved. With that faith we are not only able, we will serve love. As the Dionne Warwick song Lucy mentioned says, “what the world needs now is love sweet love,” and it goes on, “no, not just for some, but for everyone.” With that faith we will serve

hope. Hope as I was served the evening we learned of the South Carolina massacre. In the midst of my tears, I remembered the laughter and energy of the children at the Russell school we had served that day and the dedicated service and rich conversations with Blair, Jake and Katie. These young people by their very presence and engagement offered me hope. I am reminded of a quote by Marianne Williamson:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

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Thank you Blair, Jake, Katie, Amy, Lucy – and all the beloveds with whom we worshiped together, created art together, played games together, cleaned and served food together, and last and far from the least among us – the men, women, children, the beloved, we served. Each experience, and every one of you has offered me hope, joy, and a belief, a faith, that miracles really can and do happen. Thanks be to God! Amen.

¹ Williamson, Marianne, *A Return To Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles*, New York: Harper Collins. 1992.