

Sermon for June 28, 2015
Mark 5:21-43

There are things that happen in our lives that push us to the very brink of our ability to cope. Things like losing our jobs and we wonder if we will find another one; or finding out we have a debilitating illness and we wonder how we are going to live; or we look at the person we've share our lives with for so many years and we realize that it's over. The stress from these and many other situations pushes us beyond the limit of what we think we can bear. We have a name for that—it's what we call being at the end of our rope. Most of us at one time or another will face these situations.

In our Gospel reading for today we meet two such people who had reached the end of their ropes—Jairus whose daughter is dying and an unnamed woman whose illness has consumed her life. We first meet Jairus; a leader of the local synagogue who comes to Jesus and begs him to heal his daughter. Jesus interrupts his plans and immediately goes with Jairus to his home. But while on their way there; a woman who has suffered with an illness for 12 years comes and touches the fringe of Jesus' cloak. She was so desperate that she believed all she had to do was to touch Jesus' clothes and she would be healed. And she was!

Jesus tells her that her trust in him—her faith has healed her, but I think that equally important is the trust and courage it took for her to go out into the crowd and seek out Jesus. Remember that in this society women do not go out alone; especially to touch a man who is not her relative. Then there is the fact that her illness has made her ritually unclean; an outcast from her society. She shouldn't

even be around people lest she touch them and make them unclean too. She is unable to participate in any of the normal activities of life, even worship in the synagogue. She has spent countless hours and untold amounts of money to rid herself of this disease, but nothing has helped her. She was at the end of her rope, but rather than give up she finds the courage and trust to go and see the one who is healing people in God's name.

While all of this is happening between Jesus and the unnamed woman; word comes from Jairus' house that his daughter has died; he need not trouble Jesus anymore. We would tend to think that this is the end of it, but Jesus tells him, "Do not fear, only believe." What a strange thing to say to someone whose daughter has just died. We expect to hear, "I'm so sorry for your loss" or "Please let me know if there is anything I can do for you." But to hear, "Do not fear, only believe" goes beyond our imagination. The fact that this learned, respected leader of the synagogue came to Jesus and fell on his knees to beg him to come and heal his daughter; makes us believe that he was at the end of his rope too. What is he to believe in now that his daughter is dead?

To answer that question we need to look at the purpose for miracles in Jesus' ministry. They weren't for some kind of show or to convince those who didn't believe in him—remember even with all the miracles he did; Jesus was still crucified. They were acts of compassion to the human need that was all around him. But they were more than that; they were the in breakings of God's kingdom into our world. So what Jesus was asking this grieving father to believe in was

that God had begun working to make all things new through Jesus here and now; and somehow this would make a difference for him.

What do we believe in when we reach the end of our ropes? Sometimes it's hard for us to believe in miracles. What do we do when life brings us things so painful, so devastating that it feels like we're being pushed further than we can humanly cope? If we're honest, we'd have to admit that our faith weakens or sometimes leaves us entirely. Is there some way to face those devastating losses without letting go of our faith? What can we believe in when it seems like we have nothing left to believe in?

We can start with the people surrounding us. We can believe in the people who show us love and compassion; who walk with us during our darkest hours. We may also need to take a hard look within ourselves. When we are at the end of our rope we can believe that life isn't over. One part of our life may be ending, but another is just beginning. Ultimately, what we can believe is that the one who has been walking with us since our birth will continue to walk with us and even carry us when life gets too tough. We can believe that God is working in and through everything—all of the heartbreak and sorrow—in this world to bring new life.

When the things in our lives push us to the end of our rope; we have a choice. We can hide in our beds and pull the covers over our heads and live in fear. Or we can move forward embracing our feelings, and trust that God has a future for us. Just because we're at the end of our rope doesn't mean that our life is over; it may just mean that something different is about to begin! If we can only trust and

open our hearts to see the new possibilities, it may just be the greatest miracle of all! In closing I want to leave you with some thoughts about how each of us can help the other in our midst.

What is all this touching in church? It used to be a person could come to church and sit in the pew and not be bothered by all this friendliness and certainly not by touching. I used to come to church and leave untouched. Now I have to be nervous about what's expected of me. I have to worry about responding to the person sitting next to me. Oh, I wish it could be the way it used to be. I could just ask the person next to me: How are you? And the person could answer: Oh, just fine, and we'd both go home . . . strangers who have known each other for twenty years. But now the minister asks us to look at each other. I'm worried about that hurt look I saw in that woman's eyes. Now I'm concerned, because when the minister asks us to pass the peace, the man next to me held my hand so tightly I wondered if he had been touched in years. Now I'm upset because the lady next to me cried and then apologized and said it was because I was so kind and that she needed a friend right now. Now I have to get involved. Now I have to suffer when this community suffers. Now I have to be more than a person coming to observe a service. That man last week told me I'd never know how much I'd touched his life. All I did was smile and tell him I understood what it was to be lonely. Lord, I'm not big enough to touch and be touched! The stretching scares me. What if I disappoint somebody? What if I'm too pushy? What if I cling too much? What if somebody ignores me? "Pass the peace." "The peace of God be with you." "And with you." And mean it. Lord, I can't resist meaning it! I'm touched by it, I'm enveloped by it! I find I do care about that person next to me! I find I **am** involved! And I'm scared. O Lord, be here beside me. You touch me, Lord, so that I can touch and be touched! So that I can care and be cared for! So that I can share my life with all those others that belong to you! All this touching in church—Lord, it's changing me!¹

¹ Ann Weems in *Reaching for Rainbows*, 1980 Westminster Press