



Proper 13, Year B – June 28, 2009

Mark 5.21-43

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

For those of us who have a relationship with Christ it is easy to believe that he is always walking beside us acting as our companion on the journey. In Mark's Gospel today we hear a different story. We hear about a woman, desperate for healing, who chases Jesus down, gets through the security shift that are his disciples, and touches his garment. Interestingly if we listen closely we can hear Jesus almost being taken aback by this intrusion, at this receiving of something not offered.

As some of you know I just returned from a trip to the Land of the Holy One. In the South of Israel, in the area surrounding Jerusalem, it is arid and dry. It is in the Judean desert and the only lush landscape is on the shores of the Jordan river. But our story happens in the North, near what is now the border of Lebanon.

The Jordan river flows South from the River of Dan. The area around the River of Dan is surprisingly lush and walking through it reminds us of walking near a rushing Mountain stream here in our backyard. It has large trees and underbrush, something not seen in most of Israel. It is an area in which we find the oldest gate – some 4000 years old where Abraham and Sarah would have arrived after their trip through the Sinai desert. The gates were to protect the cities "secret" – the source of their water. A conversation that is familiar to us in the 21st century was one that they were having in ancient times about the judicious use of this most precious commodity.

Just south of the River of Dan lies the Sea of Galilee. It is so named because there was no word for lake but I assure you it is no Sea. For those of you who are familiar with BC it looks very much like Shushwap Lake. Surrounded by Mountain slopes this lake that provided so much of the local economy is small enough that you can easily see the other side and shallow enough that the strong winds that blow can kick up a mighty storm. It is on the shores of this lake that Jesus did a big part of his ministry. From here he gathered hard working individuals to become his faithful followers; it is to here that he retreated to contemplate his best course of action in regards to Rome. It is on the shores of this lake that he spoke to the multitudes that would have gathered from all of the surrounding villages and beyond. It is here that we hear the most about Jesus' pastoral ministry that we should hold out as a model of what it means to be a follower of this man, this divinity, Jesus Christ.

It is on these shores of Galilee in a small town of Capernaum where Jesus stays with Peter's mother in law. In the ruins of the house, now carefully covered by a Church as are most things in the Land of the Holy One, you can see the cramped close quarters in which they would have lived, slept, ate and had fellowship. It is difficult to imagine a life like that coming from our minimum 1500 square foot homes having so many people gathered together in one place. But it is in fellowship, in conversation, in teaching, that we receive the gift that we have today and close proximity is one way of developing fellowship. There was no room to isolate yourself, no room to escape to; you were part of the family unit, part of the gathering, part of the camaraderie that developed your sense of who you were and how you fit into this world that God created.

So Jesus, returning back to shore from a trip across the miles, returning back from time in the boat; the closest thing he got to solitude, is met by throngs of people who are hungry to hear everything he utters, to witness everything he does, to be comforted by this man who is at once God and man. There is no rest for Jesus only tasks, only God's work to be done, because he has so little time and so much to teach

them. Immediately, one of Mark's favourite words by the way, he is met by a leader of the Synagogue who tells him that his child is sick and dying. Now for Jairus to do this was a big thing and not to be dismissed lightly. For a leader of the synagogue to beg for Jesus' help was to give him credibility. In the first chapter of Mark we hear about Jesus entering the Synagogue and teaching. This is unheard of for anyone other than a high priest. We hear about Jesus entering the synagogue and eating the bread that is reserved only for the high priest's saying that the Sabbath was about the living, about the people, and not about ritual. In what is called the "Jesus Synagogue" in Capernaum there are three doors as is tradition. Jesus did not enter the door to the left or the right as is custom. The centre door is left only for the long awaited Messiah; for the presence of God. And Jesus walked right through it and began spreading God's word. So when Jairus, a high priest in the Jewish faith, comes to Jesus for help with his 12 year old daughter he gives a stamp of approval to his teaching about the Sabbath, about the Scriptures, and about God. All of the throngs of people surrounding and pressing in on Jesus would have been acutely aware of this fact and would have been curious to see how this drama played out. A mere man professing to be God being approached by a religious leader for divine intervention; a curious set of circumstances to be sure.

Imagine if you will walking down the street with a great multitude of people pushing to be near you, pushing just to touch you, straining their ears to hear every word that you say. Add a few cameras, a few autograph pads and some pens and you have what nowadays we would consider to be a celebrity following. Jesus was the celebrity of his day at least on the shores of Galilee where Rome was not out to get him, to crush him, to kill him.

Pushing, shouting, begging happening all around him Jesus responds to this leader of the religious community. He does not rebuke him, he does not say you didn't believe me in the Temple therefore how dare you believe in me now in your hour of need. Jesus works his way through the crowd surrounded by the energy and chaos that comes with it to the desired destination.

And then there is the woman, desperate for cleansing, desperate for healing. It is important to note and I'm sure that you've heard before that her desperation comes from her separation and ostracism from the community to which she belonged. In the ancient custom a woman is unclean if she is menstruating and this woman had not stopped haemorrhaging for twelve long years. Please recall what I said about fellowship, about camaraderie, that comes with living in close community. This woman would have been excluded from all such gatherings, would have missed out on all that is learned from listening, from sharing and from the comfort that is received by being fully present with others. Perhaps more importantly, she would have been unable to enter the Synagogue, unable to make sacrifice, unable to listen to the words of the Holy Scriptures and therefore been unable to have a relationship with God.

Through this throng of people, through the chaos surrounding Jesus, she barrels through the security offered by his disciples she reaches out and touches his cloak. Jesus, feeling the energy that is taken from him when he performs a healing, asks who has done this. Jesus, so absorbed in the task at hand, so focussed on his destination at the home of Jairus, is taken aback by what may seem an intrusion on his mission. I imagine Jesus, for a moment, being humbled. I imagine Jesus, for a moment, being reminded that it is important to pay attention to what is around you in the present instead of solely focussed on the destination ahead. And Jesus stops. Imagine the crowds continuing to move forward with Jesus suddenly standing still. Imagine that them suddenly realizing that Jesus is no longer at the centre of the throng. Imagine them stopping, looking around confused and seeing Jesus respond to this woman, this desperate woman, who wanted so badly to come back into community. Jesus changed his course.

Two years ago my family and I set off for a mountain adventure. Our intention was to go to Highwood Pass to see if there was still snow there in June but in our enthusiasm we turned off of Highway 22 too early and ended up in the area of Maclean Pond. We stopped and asked where we were and the folks at the little store kindly gave us a map.

We continued driving through the foothills enjoying the scenery. As we passed over a Texas gate I got into a staring contest with a very large bull who didn't want to move. Eventually as I moved slowly forward he and his posse got out of the way.

We turned onto Powderface Road even though the sign said that travel was not recommended. We soon found out why. We came upon a bridge where the creek had swelled and flooded the road. We were able to pass over without getting stuck and got out to witness the change in the creek.

There was so much water that the trees looked as if they were floating on top of it. You could barely make out where the creek should have been as it resembled a pond more than a moving, flowing body of water.

Just yesterday we did exactly the same thing, went on exactly the same journey, again by mistake. As we came upon that same bridge on Powderface Road we noticed that what had been a flood. What seemed like a one time event had actually permanently changed the course of the creek that flowed down from the mountain. As I looked at the old path, the creek bed that was drying up, I thought about the fact that in our lives sometimes one time events permanently change our path. We often say that we are waiting for things to "get back to normal". But just as the creek bed lay dry and barren, sometimes we can't go back again.

The new path, the place where the water now flowed, was not without its roadblocks. Just as in life, it did not have a clear, unobstructed journey. The trees whose roots now lay under the water, that two years ago stood strong and green, were losing their needles, shedding their bark and being returned to the earth that lie beneath.

Jesus on his way to Jairus' home, intent on healing the twelve year old girl, had his path changed by the pleas of a woman in need. I believe that we are called to be changed, to have our course altered, by the love of God and God's intent for us. We may not like the new path. There may be obstacles in the way and we may look forlornly at what lies behind us. But think of this. That old creek bed will find new life. It will no longer be covered with flowing water but seeds will be planted and new life will come forth. And when we let ourselves be changed by God the things that look like obstacles will become an important part of our journey and we will find a way to get through them, to get around them, to incorporate them into who we are to become.

Many of the stories that we hear in the Scripture readings every week are about community. In Paul's letters he addresses the communities of Corinth, of Rome, of Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica and Collasia. He does not address the leader of the community or even individual members of the community. By the time we have Paul responding to the followers of Jesus they have already received the message – it is about the whole community more than the individuals within it.

It would be easy today to focus on the last line of Paul's letter to the community in Corinth that says "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little." This statement has long been used to placate the wealthy so they don't feel guilty about the destitute masses. It is important to

remember that this quote was not in the scriptures about finance but rather about the Israelites who received manna in the desert. It is talking about the basics of food and not of the abundance of material wealth. But to focus on this one part of the passage would be to ignore the rest of the passage. In today's letter we hear Paul talking about the abundance of God, the stewardship of God's whole creation, and that ownership always remains with God.

There is one other important statement in this passage, about finishing what you start. Paul asks for carry through, for commitment, for the continuation of the ministry to which we are all called. We have all been given different gifts. Some are financial and therefore we are called to share financially. Some are of teaching and we are therefore called to teach. Some are of service and we are therefore called to offer service to the ministry of one another. We are all called to give as we have been given to.

So from Mark's gospel we learn that even Jesus was taken off stride and asked to focus on the present rather than the end goal or destination. As he stopped and spoke to the woman who desperately wanted to return to community he told her that her faith had made her well. And her faith had made him stop. Her faith had made him change his direction. Her faith had heightened his awareness of his current circumstance. Her faith had brought about a change in her, in Jesus and in the throngs of people who witnessed the situation. In Paul's letter we hear about our call to be good stewards of what we have received. We hear about how to give in thanksgiving for what we have received.

So allow your faith to make you stop. Allow your faith to keep you present. Allow Jesus to change your path and to direct you life in a new way. Allow your faith to heighten your awareness of those around you. Allow your faith to fill your heart with thanksgiving so that we might offer unto God what we have been given. And allow your faith to change you.

And for all of the gifts we have been given, we give thanks to God.