

Your Faith has Made You Well

Mark 5:21-43

A pastor was giving a children's chat one Sunday and decided to use a flashlight to illustrate what he was talking about. "We are to be the light of the world even as Jesus was," he told them. He had filled the inside of the flashlight with stuff which he proceeded to empty. While inserting batteries that were labeled "Jesus," he said, "When we have Jesus in our hearts, we become lights. When he pushed the button on the flashlight, nothing happened. A little boy interrupted in a loud voice, "It won't work unless you screw the head on straight."

I choose that incident because I'm always intrigued by what seems to be a common notion that Christians can be categorized as either a head person or a heart person. Look what happens with the flashlight. It's not enough to sort them out into those with their heads screwed on straight and those with Jesus inside. Both have to be in place in order for the flashlight to work. In order for us to be the light of the world, we must have Jesus in our hearts and have our heads screwed on straight.

I'm not going to spend time trying to balance emotion and intellect, but I do want to begin to explore what it means to have faith in such a way that we are made well. What does this wellness look like for us? Why might Jesus say to one of us, "Your faith has made you well?"

We begin by remembering that Mark's Gospel is primarily about the Kingdom of God—the Kingdom of God verses the kingdom of the emperor. It is not a violent contest, but opposite ways of viewing the world and achieving justice and peace. In a world dominated by the Roman Empire and during a peace that is achieved and maintained through violence, a peaceful peasant from Nazareth shows up preaching the good news that the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come.

Now for one reading this first Gospel for the first time, there is quite a surprise. This man has a lot of nerve saying such things when clearly the Kingdom of Caesar is all around. This sounds like a grandiose notion because, to look around, it looks like little has changed.

Mark begins to show that there are no geographical boundaries that hem in the Kingdom of God. Jesus begins his ministry, and where there is obedience and discipleship, there is the Kingdom. Jesus has all kinds of people becoming citizens of the Kingdom: prostitutes, tax collectors, even some Romans. Last week we saw that even the storms and waves are obedient to the words of Jesus.

Today we find Jesus and the disciples on the other side of the lake where a large crowd has gathered. Jesus encounters a synagogue leader named Jairus. Jairus isn't here to discuss the presence or the nature of the Kingdom of God or to become part of the movement. He has concerns that are more personal. His daughter has become deathly ill, and has heard that this Jesus may be able to heal her. Jairus may not even care so much about the Kingdom of God. He just wants his girl to be healed, so he interrupts Jesus in order to put his faith in him.

It must not have been easy for Jairus. Being a synagogue leader, he would have to overcome a considerable amount of pride in order to fall before a lowly itinerant preacher. But he does it. He does it because he loves his daughter. His faith is pushing him past his pride. This synagogue leader has asked this preacher to come lay hands on her that she might be healed. So they start making their way, and the crowd follows closely, pressing in on him.

But wait, there's another interruption. A woman who has had hemorrhages for twelve years is after Jesus for her healing. Now her faith works somewhat differently than that of Jairus. The woman has not pride, but shame. For twelve years she has been considered unclean and was ostracized from society. Her faith pushes her beyond her shame. Imagine how much more difficult it is if she has knowledge that Jesus is God's Son. She dares to join the crowd that is in the presence of God's Son.

She sneaks up behind him and touches his clothes, and her hemorrhages stop. Immediately Jesus is aware that power has gone forth from him. He notices that someone has touched him in faith and stops to ask who it was.

If I were Jairus at this point, I would be saying to Jesus, "Never mind who it was! That woman is healed, God bless her. Now let's get going to my daughter. Or if I were one of the disciples, I might be saying, "Yes, anyway. Let's get on with this dying girl thing so we can get back to preaching the Kingdom of God."

Jesus stops and takes the time to talk to the woman and reassure her that she is well. While he is speaking, there is yet another interruption. Someone comes to tell Jairus that his daughter is dead and that he may as well not bother Jesus any longer. To this Jesus says, "**Do not fear. Only believe.**"

Have you ever met someone who is ridiculously laid back even under the most pressing circumstances? Jeff is a fellow I went to seminary with. He was so laid back it made me wonder if he took his life seriously. When we would be nearing the end of a semester, and everyone is

scurrying to get ready for finals and get their papers done, there's Jeff, strolling around campus and laughing and carrying on like he didn't have a worry in the world.

I imagine Jesus strolling to Jairus's house in a similar way. He doesn't get anxious when he hears the news of the girl's death. He doesn't seem stressed when he has so many things on his plate at once. This is all part of his ministry.

Jesus says to the woman, "Your faith has made you well." The question we could ask today is, "How can my faith make me well when I feel like I am not?" What does that kind of faith look like? First, observe Jesus. Observe how Jesus is able to maintain his faith and wellness, if you will, in today's story. You might be thinking, "Come on pastor, this is Jesus you're talking about. Of course he is able to maintain his wellness."

And I would say that you are absolutely right. But because he is Jesus, there is something he never loses sight of. He knows all the way through this episode that everything is going to turn out ok. If he could somehow be unsure about that, he may have become anxious when he learned that Jairus's daughter was about to die. But because of what he knows, he remains calm and carries out his ministry one moment at a time.

In the life of our congregation, we have a lot of things going on just like Jesus and his disciples. Like Jesus and his disciples, we proceed with a clear mission in mind. Our own mission statement could serve as the opening verses, if you will, to our story in our time:

Drawing upon the strengths of our heritage,
Our mission is to serve God
By spreading the news of [God's] love
And the promise of Jesus Christ.
As faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us,
We will be inclusive of all people
And serve the spiritual, physical and
Emotional needs and development of our church members,
The wider community, and the world.
We will be stewards of our youth
And future generations,
Providing guidance, education and resources.

With this Kingdom-building mission in mind we go about our various ministries and our common ministry. Like the woman with the hemorrhages, we seek out one another, and others come to us wanting to be made well. The Called to Care ministry, Elder of the Week, Howard Roosa tutors and drivers, disaster relief ministries, and so many other ministries—these are all responses to obvious needs for people to be made well.

We have decided to look at building up our church facility and to look at building up our youth ministry. Somewhere in the middle of all this activity we are brought news that our senior pastor has been called by God to be in another place. Some of us may find ourselves wondering if we should trouble ourselves with some of these things any longer. What would Jesus say? **“Do not fear, only believe.”**

Brothers and sisters, we are a crowd of people pressing in on Jesus. Jesus knows that everything is going to turn out in a way that is good. Observe Jesus and follow Jesus with faith. That faith will make us well.

It turns out that this is true in our family lives as well. I was serving on consistory at my home church when our building was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. In the years that followed, we were pressing in against Jesus to hear what he would have us do. And you know what? The same thing happened with individual families. It began by family members telling stories about what they were doing when they heard the news. Then they were sharing family memories from the building that no longer was. The next thing you knew, people were talking about what a vital role that, not just our church, but Jesus had in families for generations. Families are crowds pressing in on Jesus to see what he is going to do. Observe Jesus.

The other thing our faith does to make us well is to empower us to overcome pride and shame. Originally, I was planning to treat pride and shame individually. In seminary, the sin of pride and the sin of self-deprecation were discussed as sins that are opposite in nature. With the sin of pride, one thinks more highly of one's self than they ought. With the sin of self-deprecation, one thinks much less of one's self than they ought.

Here's the thing: Pride and shame are often messy things to try to sort out. For example, let's say that a woman has been advised to seek help after being abused by her husband. Let's say furthermore that the woman says, “Help? You think I need to seek help? Don't you worry about me! I'll be fine!”

Whether it is pride or shame that prevents her from seeking help isn't really all that clear without some kind of exploration. Most likely, it is some of both. She may be actually feeling (and this actually happens) like she got what she deserved. Yet she refuses to tarnish the image of herself and her family. There's a messy mix of shame and pride, a roller coaster of emotions.

Our Scripture teaches us that faith makes us well by pushing us through BOTH pride and shame. Whether you are a leader or someone who is socially marginalized, whether you are a family or a church, press in on Jesus, and your faith will make you well.

It's this pressing in on Jesus that helps us build faith. Don't think that you can simply attack your own pride and shame or that you can mimic Jesus without being close to him. Jesus does not say that doing these things makes you faithful. He says your faith has made you well.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that “**faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**” When you press in on Jesus and you find assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen, you find yourself feeling reasonably non-anxious. Your faith has made you well. Or better yet, Jesus has made you well because he is the one you were pressing in on.

I want to close with a prayer that I came across recently. Dr. Marcus Borg shared this at the Spring Convocation at Eden Seminary this spring, and I offer it that we might draw ever closer to God and find faith that makes us well. The author of this prayer is St. Augustine, so it's roughly 1600 years old. Like Dr. Borg did at the Convocation, I'm going to read it through twice so we can really hear and pray the words:

O God, from whom to be turned is to fall,
To whom to be turned is to rise,
in whom to stand is to abide forever,
In all our work, grant us your help.
In all our perplexities, grant us your guidance.
In all our dangers, grant us your protection.
In all our sorrows, grant us your peace.