

Massanutten Presbyterian Church
June 28, 2009
Ann Pettit, Associate for Member Care

A Funny Thing Happened...
Mark 5:21-43

It has been an interesting and surprising week in the news. We have received word of the death of at least 3 entertainers whose names carry a variety of visual and audio images in Ed McMann, Farah Fawcett and Michael Jackson. In other venues names like Mark Sanford and Mahmoud Ahmadinajad have or continue to make headlines, bringing their own set of images to the fore.

The powerful impressions these and other names and situations behind them make on us, is a regular part of life in our world now. Through the media, we have become acquainted with news makers, their names and very often their personal lives. When something happens, we want to know who's involved, what their names are and any other detail significant or mundane that happens to be available. Fame, notoriety – it captivates us, and while what fascinates me, may not fascinate you, someone, somewhere gets our attention – and we want to know more.

In stark contrast to this, two of the primary people in today's reading are completely unnamed, and identifiable only by their circumstances. In fact, one of the circumstances surrounding their lives is indeed, their very namelessness.

The story begins with what must have been quite a scene on the shore of Galilee. Jesus had just arrived, having crossed the sea following some time spent with the Gerasenes. While there, he had healed a demon-possessed man, sending the legion of demons into a herd of swine. The 2000 demon filled swine plummeted down a steep bank, into the sea to their death. After sending the man off to 'go and tell' his story, Jesus and the disciples crossed back to the Galilee region, where our narrative finds him this morning.

Many have gathered around Jesus, and from the midst of the crowd, a man named Jairus emerges, throwing himself at Jesus' feet. His 'little daughter' is sick and he desperately wants Jesus to come and heal her. We are given no name for the child, but what we know of Jairus helps us fill in the gaps. Jairus was a leader in the synagogue, which tells us he had a certain degree of status and wealth, but also that he probably had colleagues and even friends who were part of the opposition gaining strength surrounding Jesus' ministry. This wealth and status would have given him opportunities to seek medical care for his daughter; that he was begging Jesus to come to his home tells us that the care had not been successful.

We also learn that the 'little daughter' was 12 years old, which at the time made her more akin to a young woman than 'little daughter.' And so, we surmise that Jairus' affection for his child was deep; so deep in fact, that he was willing to risk his reputation – perhaps even his position in the synagogue - to cure her. He was desperate enough to reach out to Jesus.

On the way to heal Jairus' daughter, Jesus was interrupted by a strange sensation as an unnamed woman reached out to touch him. Again, though we never learn her name, we do learn much from Mark's description of her. She had been sick, battling hemorrhages for 12 years. At the beginning of her illness she evidently had some wealth of her own because we're told she had been able to consult with a variety of doctors and received many forms of treatment. Unfortunately, all of that had left her only worse, not better. Further, we can surmise that she was alone in the world because this condition made her ritually unclean, meaning she had to live in isolation. She knew she could not approach Jesus directly – and she knew that Jesus could not reach out to her. Any human contact would be dangerous, potentially subjecting her to even greater isolation. In a different way, but just as significantly, she too risked much in pushing her way through the crowd to touch Jesus. She was out of bounds, endangering others by her assertiveness. Yet, like Jairus, she was desperate and like his daughter, she needed what Jesus had to offer.

At first glance, these two stories, and the striking similarities between them lend themselves to being categorized as healing miracles. And, of course, they certainly are. We read that upon touching Jesus' garments, the woman felt the hemorrhaging stop, and after arriving at Jairus' house, Jesus raised his daughter, who had died before they got there (perhaps because Jesus was interrupted on his way). In both cases, the desired miracle of healing was received.

These are weighty passages in our reading of Scripture – particularly at points in our own lives in which our prayers for health and healing are deep and frequent, and go seemingly unanswered or worse, answered in ways that don't fulfill our hopes. We can all cite places in our lives where our prayers for healing don't take us where we want to go. A look back to Job from last week, reminds us that Job found solace not because God healed him or raised his children, but rather in the continuing steadiness and engagement of God in the world. And through that certainty, in the restoration of his own relationship to the God who created him and the world around him.

Like Job's pleas and the initiative taken by Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman, our prayers to God for healing are not simply an end in themselves. They are, in fact, a vehicle for deepening our relationship with God. Michael L. Lindvall, the Pastor of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York, and the author of several books including, [Good News from North Haven](#) described the journey of a good friend, battling Parkinson's Disease. From the point of his diagnosis he and his family began praying that God would heal him of the disease. Over the next 20 years the disease progressed, and the friend lived with the ever-increasing debilitating stages of Parkinson's. Somewhere in the midst of those years,

the friend confided in Lindvall that he had been healed explaining that while he hadn't been healed of the *disease*, he had been healed of his *fear* of Parkinson's.

The hemorrhaging woman had heard about Jesus – but it was her action in reaching out to Jesus that opened her up to an experience of Him. Jairus had heard about Jesus - most likely in ways that would bolster a case against him – but it was his willingness to lay all that aside that opened him to the possibilities of a relationship with him. For both, healing came on more than one level.

Now, if we look at the passage from a slightly different angle, we can't help but hear in Mark's words the striking similarities between the two women in these passages, and pull from that a clear message from Jesus' ministry. *First off*, again, both women are unnamed – we can only identify them by their plight, or, in the case of Jairus' daughter, by her father. *Secondly*, both are relegated to one of the lowest places in society by virtue of their gender – they're women: they are more like property than people. *Third*, both are sick, and have endured much in the course of treatment. And *finally*, both are ritually unclean: the woman by her hemorrhaging, and the daughter by her death. These two women are untouchable, the forgotten, dismissed, and unwanted of society.

And yet, Jesus' response bypasses all of that. To the hemorrhaging woman, he offers affirmation of her bold faith. There is no scolding, recrimination or consequences for the many boundaries she crossed in touching him. Not only that, but His words elevate her to a new place when he called her 'daughter,' a term of affection, endearment and relationship. The one who was cast away was brought near by word and action.

As for Jairus' daughter, without hesitation Jesus reached out and took her hand: *he touched her* and in that touch not only gave her life, but brought *her* near, disregarding cleanliness regulations and rituals.

While this passage gives us an account of two healings, it also offers us a clear picture of Jesus' attentiveness to those with little or no voice of their own: to those who are marginalized, isolated, sick, lonely, least likely to be seen or heard above the noise of that which is deemed 'news worthy.'

Jesus felt the touch of the hemorrhaging woman – even in the midst of a crowd that jostled and bumped up against him; Jesus knew she was there and beckoned her to him.

And he heard the cries of the child, whose voice came in the shape of a father desperate to help his child, even at great personal risk.

In both situations, Jesus gave of himself generously, and yes, with risk. He gave what he had to offer.

And what about us? In our lives, what voices are calling to us, that we might be challenged to hear above the noisiness of our lives? Who are the people without names that are reaching out to us? What are the places we are asked to go and offer a ministry of hope and healing?

These are some of the questions we've been asking and praying about in this Visioning Process. And, as you heard earlier, they are also some of the questions for which answers are beginning to emerge. I invite you to continue to discern in your own life, as well in this body of Christ, how Jesus' ministry in our passage this morning challenges us to reach out with grace and compassion. Let us pray...

God of voices loud and soft, big and small, near and far,

*Help us to hear with your ears, that we would silence that which is noisy and
hear you calling us into your ministry of healing.*

Through Christ, Amen.