

Blood and Blessing
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July 1, 2018

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27
Mark 5:21-43

The passage in Mark begins with a crossing of the Sea of Galilee. When we hear of crossings in the Bible, we can anticipate that something significant will happen: Jacob crossing the river Jordan to reunite with his brother Esau, decades after he had cheated his brother of his birthright; the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea out of slavery into their freedom; and Joshua and the next generation crossing the Jordan into the land of Canaan all mark transformations, individually, for the community, or both.

For Jesus, he had already crossed the Sea of Galilee once in the previous chapter in Mark, when he went to teach and perform healings in the country of the Geresenes. After casting out spirits from a man who was possessed and sending them into a herd of swine, causing them to rush off the bank and into the sea, the people who lived there begged them to leave their neighborhood. So, Jesus and his disciples were back on the boat, crossing yet again back into the land of their home.

Many of us are familiar with crossings, with comings and goings and how they mark and change us. Depending on how our crossings mark us, we may become braver or more frightened; wisened or careless, more connected or more differentiated from the people we left and the people we meet. It troubles my soul to think of how impactful the US border crossings of recent arrivals into the United States will be in the long run, especially for the very young and their parents, as I witness the traumas happening there.

Kathryn Matthews asks, “What did it mean that one side of the sea of Galilee was Jewish territory, and the other Gentile? Can you feel the tension and the risk, even danger, in going somewhere less hospitable, less comfortable, less safe?”¹

Jesus and his disciples were not the only ones going through powerful crossings. When he got back to his home side of the Sea of Galilee, he encountered two people who were going through passages that had them teetering on the line between life and death: The woman who had been hemorrhaging blood for twelve years, and the dying girl who was Jairus’ daughter, who was twelve years old, just the same number of years the woman on the other side of the story had been bleeding. Both were about to experience important passages.

For the woman who was bleeding, the constant flow of blood would have made her an outsider. Ironically, the reason that blood was a religious taboo was because it was just too holy. Blood is the substance of life, and it is from blood that we are born. In the eyes of Torah, blood is only acceptable when it is properly contained. Though the hemorrhaging was not killing her, it was making her unable to participate in the full life of the community. The woman, with this river of life flowing out of her, would not have been able to participate in the ritual life or even the community life of her people.

The woman’s struggle reminds me of a contemporary problem women in impoverished nations suffer. Obstetric fistula is an injury women or girls get during prolonged childbirth that creates an abnormal opening in a woman or girl between her birth canal and rectum or urethra-- it happens especially to girls who give birth as teenagers and to women who give birth after they have had traditional practices that involve genital cutting. According to the World Health Organization, Women who experience

¹ Kathryn Matthews, “Sermon Seeds July 1, 2018” on www.ucc.org/worship

obstetric fistula suffer constant incontinence, shame, social segregation and health problems. It is estimated that more than 2 million young women live with untreated obstetric fistula in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In the fall, we are planning to hear from a speaker from the Freedom from Fistula Foundation, which helps women and girls pay for surgeries to repair fistulas so they may return to health, and return to community life.

The woman Jesus encounters does not wait for Jesus to turn and notice her. Rather, she reaches for her *life*, holding out faith that there has got to be something more than the harshness she has known and lived, not really living, for the past 12 years. While this woman reached to Jesus for life, Jairus's daughter was heading towards her death. Jairus was a synagogue leader, an important man, and yet in his desperation he was reduced to looking towards this traveling folk healer for that which he had no power over. While we don't know the child's name, we know that her father's name, Jairus, in Greek means "he who will be awakened."² Jesus' advice to Jairus, who as a parent puts everything on the line for his daughter's well-being, even ridicule by his cohorts in power, is this: "Do not fear. Only believe."

He moved past the weepers and wailers, and just as the bleeding woman had reached out to touch Jesus, Jesus then reached out to touch the child everyone thought dead, taking her hand and telling her, "*Talitha cum,*" little girl get up!

Like Jairus and his daughter, like the hemorrhaging woman, we live with great suffering around us. I do not believe that this passage is pointing us necessarily toward a faith that heals, but I have complete trust that it pushes us towards a faith that accompanies and a faith that gives hope.

Jesus, who crossed the Sea of Galilee back and forth, knew the way of the crossings between life and death. He knew the way between fear and

² Matthews

faith. He knew the way from abandonment to community. He knew the way from one side to another.

You or someone you love may find you are closer to an experience that does not feel like life to you. Let me tell you that if there is a tiny spark within you that says there has to be something more, listen to it. That is the seed of hope that, if you listen to it, may lead you to reach for Jesus and the abundance of life Jesus offers.

Personally, I have felt despair over recent news. It is not that the latest mass shooting leaves me feeling less safe, although it does a little. It causes me to lose faith in humanity, that each month brings more people who would make a choice for death rather than choosing life. How has our society become so sick? And with the knowledge that a crucial seat on the Supreme Court is about to change, I fear that my family could become vulnerable to losing rights that the same Supreme Court guaranteed us three years ago. I think of the families that have been separated at the border, and I think of my own family, and I think of Jairus seeking out Jesus in his desperation over his daughter's illness, and my heart cries, "Families belong together!"

But the persistent faith of Jairus and the woman who reached for Jesus for her own healing reminds me that despair is something Jesus can work with. If we let that dissatisfaction with the way things are grow us to reach for what could and should be, a holy power accompanies us. God hears our yearnings and joins our struggle to bring forth goodness and life.

Like Jesus passing across the Sea of Galilee, we are passing through an important moment in history. Luckily, we are not in the boat by ourselves. We have the church as the vessel which sees us through, from shore to shore. It is true, sometimes in church we proclaim the impossible. We expect results we cannot see. But like Jesus who cleared away the mourners and the wailers so that he could take a child by the hand from

death to life, we have been called to live into the fullness of life. We have been called to choose faithfulness over fear. We have been called to enact God's vision for humanity so that others can see it and want to reach out to be part of it too. This is a vision that can change our lives, and it can change the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.