

**The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity
10 November 2024
Matthew 9:18-26**

Turning Back the Clock

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Holy Gospel appointed for today from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the ninth chapter.

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

By this time in Jesus' ministry, He is busy working miracles. And on this day, He is on His way to perform one miracle when He is interrupted by the need to perform another miracle.

A synagogue ruler's young daughter has died. Her father comes to Jesus seeking a miracle. "Come and lay your hand on her," he prays, "and she will live." This man believes beyond all hope that with this Jesus, the resurrection of his child is possible—and Jesus "followed him with His disciples."

But as they started off, "a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His garment." Now, she believed that Jesus could heal her without even touching her. "If I only touch His garment, I will be made well."

Both of these people who are praying and seeking a miracle—life from death, health from sickness—are asking for the clock to be turned back. They are asking for nature itself, as we accept it to be, to be undone. They are asking for a reversal of the suffering and death caused by our sins and the sins of our first parents in the Garden. They are asking Jesus to take them back to a world before sin, back to paradise, back to innocence.

And, dear friends, they believe that Jesus can do it. This is faith. And so, we see Jesus, as God in the flesh, with the power to restore the world as it was before sin, and we see people with

faith coming to Him because they believe He can, and He will, answer their prayers. In fact, Jesus tells the woman whose bleeding was cured, “your faith has made you well.” Jesus says this often to people who have been healed. And in the Greek language of the New Testament, the word “healed” is the same word as “saved.” When Christians speak of being saved, of salvation, they are speaking of being healed. It’s the same thing. You see, if you are dying—and you are—you need to be rescued. You need a doctor to intervene in your situation to save you from death. But in this life, our doctors can only save us temporarily. But Jesus, on the other hand, saves eternally. Doctors can, at best, save us from dying right now. But Jesus saves us from eternal death. And if we believe it, if we go to Jesus seeking life, He will give it to us. How sad it is that so many people simply don’t believe, and they accept sickness and death as normal and unfixable. Their lack of belief keeps them from asking, from praying.

Unbelievers even laugh in the face of our Lord’s miracles. They still do today. Jesus finally makes it to the home of the synagogue ruler to find the professional mourners and the crowds “making a commotion”—which is what they did when someone died in those days. Jesus has come to shut the whole thing down, to take charge of life and death, and to demonstrate that the world we consider normal is actually broken, and that He has come to fix it. “Go away,” He says, “for the girl is not dead, but sleeping. And they laughed at Him.”

Can you imagine? Laughing at a little girl’s funeral? Laughing at Jesus? Well, they won’t be laughing in a few minutes—at least not in mockery. The girl’s parents and the girl herself will be laughing with joy. For Jesus “went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.” And indeed, the news of this miracle spread “through all the district.”

There are a couple of interesting things which we can learn from these two miracles which the Holy Spirit caused to be recorded by not just by Matthew, but also by Mark and Luke.

We learn more details from St. Luke's account. According to Luke, the ruler, whose name was Jairus, did not know that his daughter was dead. For if he knew this, he might not have made the journey in faith seeking Jesus. But he does, dear friends. He believes that Jesus can take his daughter by the hand and heal her. And that is just what Jesus does.

The woman who was bleeding, as we also learn from St. Luke (who was a physician), had spent her life savings on doctors who could not help her. It would be easy to imagine her losing hope and simply giving up on anyone being able to heal her, maybe even being angry at God for not hearing her prayers. But look at her faith, dear friends! She doesn't even believe that Jesus has to know about her at all, but because of His mighty power, simply touching the edge of His robe can make her well. And that is just what Jesus does.

The faith of this praying father and this praying woman are both met with healing, with salvation.

And look at how powerful faith is. The woman who has been dying for twelve years is instantly made well. The spiritual uncleanness that she had (being unable to attend worship or to be around other people) has been taken away. And Jesus Himself does not become unclean as a result—which is how things normally work. And again, the little girl, whose entire span of life had been twelve years (as we learn from St. Luke), had died. But the faith of her father brought Jesus and salvation to her. And even though the law stipulated that touching a dead body made one unclean, that isn't the case with Jesus. Instead of making Him ritually unclean, Jesus makes the dead and the dying clean. Jesus makes the sinner pure. Jesus takes our uncleanness upon Himself, where it is swallowed up by His righteousness.

The Law doesn't apply to Jesus, because Jesus keeps the Law. Sin and death do not overcome Him, but He overcomes sin and death. And the healing that this woman and this girl

experience are previews of the cross and of the empty tomb, of the end of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, just as they were before the fall in the Garden. Jesus has come to turn back the clock to a time before we started dying. And our faith makes us well.

And here we see the same faith happening in different ways. The woman believes in Jesus, comes to Him, and Jesus makes her well through her faith. But what about the little girl? She cannot believe for herself, as she is dead. It is her father who brings Jesus to her. Her father's faith brings about a saving encounter with Jesus which results in her resurrection.

Some people come to faith as adults. They may have been in a state of uncleanness and dying spiritually for years. We don't know how faith works, it is a mystery. But people do indeed hear about Jesus, believe that He can and will save them, and they put their trust in Him. And Jesus brings them from dying to living. Others come to faith as children. They are often tiny infants, unable to ask for salvation themselves. But their parents come to Jesus in faith, and they ask Him to lay His hand on their children, who need of a second birth, so that they might live. Whenever Jesus comes and heals, that is, saves, there is faith. And while we are so overwhelmed by the mighty power and compassion of Jesus in this passage, we should not overlook the fact that Jesus hears the prayers of those who come to Him and who ask in faith—knowing that He has the power and the compassion to replace sickness with health, uncleanness with purity, and even death with life.

And Jesus is not bothered by your prayers. Jesus is not made unclean in His contact with us. Jesus is not too busy for us. Jesus makes Himself available to us today, even though it is in a way which depend—perhaps even more—on faith. We cannot touch His garment, but we can eat His body and drink His blood. He doesn't walk to our house and lay His hand on our children in

the same way that He does at the home of Jairus, but He does lay the hand of a pastor upon our children with cleansing water, making them disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We cannot hear Jesus preaching with His own mouth, but we hear His Word as the Holy Spirit has caused it to be written for us, and we hear that Word proclaimed.

Faith is still what connects us to Jesus to make us well. We believe in Him even when doctors cannot help us. Even when our children have died. We believe and we pray. And Jesus has the power to turn back the clock to paradise. For when He returns, He will raise all who have been saved by grace, through faith, from the sleep of death. And on that day, nobody will laugh at Jesus. But we will laugh with Him in joy. In the meantime, let us follow the lead of Jairus and this woman with the issue of blood: let us pray, let us have faith, let us go to where He is found. For here, He assures us that we are made well in faith. Here, He assures us that we are saved through faith. Here, He assures you that you are forgiven for all your sins.

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—
Amen

Sermon based on one by the Rev. Larry Beane