

The God of Hopeless Cases
Mark 5:21-43
27 June 2021
sermon by Rev. Jessica McCrae

To really understand the significance of these stories the Gospel writer Mark chose to include, you have to understand a bit about life in 1st century Palestine. It was tough. For the average person, it was tough. For women, it was even tougher. The country was under occupation by Roman forces, everyone was on edge all the time, soldiers roamed the streets, but that didn't mean everyone was safe – far from it. Add to it the political tension, the increasing class divisions, death and disease were rampant, medicines were scant and largely ineffective, women had no security or status ... these were pretty tough times.

And into that, God came.

Into that, God comes.

Into our world today, filled with covid, brought to its knees with this pandemic, facing increasing racism and division, the climate crisis, God comes.

These are pretty tough times too. Which is why I love these two stories that Mark includes and I'm so glad they have come up in

our lectionary this week. Because we need to be reminded that into even situations like this, even into the hopeless cases, God comes.

Hopeless case stories, they transcend time, because we have all heard or, known, or lived through situations that seemed beyond hope, beyond redemption, we have all known the sense of hopelessness in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. When you think of these hopeless cases you might think of something huge like climate change, the rising ocean levels, covid mutations or the difficult job of creating true reconciliation with the Indigenous communities on this land. Or maybe you feel, or remember how it feels, to be up against something seemingly insurmountable in your own life, your own family – a difficult diagnosis, ailing family member, or a traumatic event. We can all relate to overwhelming situations that leave us feeling utterly hopeless and helpless.

That is exactly how the characters in our Gospel were feeling too. Jairus was at the end of his rope, watching his daughter as she lay there dying. He had been told there was nothing that could be done for her, there simply weren't the resources, there wasn't the technology, this 12 year old was going to die. And the woman who

was bleeding? Not only was her energy depleting and her health compromised, but she was isolated and shunned from her community. She was considered unclean, and at a time when she most needed encouragement and comfort, she was alone. These were hopeless cases, if ever there were.

And in their desperation, they came to the one person they thought could help, and they weren't disappointed. Though the leaders who were at Jairus' house questioned why he would trouble Jesus any more, since his daughter was dead already, and Jesus' friends had questioned the woman who reached out and touched Jesus' robe, those locked in the midst of their hopeless case, those desperate for new life, knew where to go.

“Do not fear, only believe.”

This is such a powerful reminder for us today.

Do not fear, only believe.

And it worked. In these stories, it worked. Jesus was able to resurrect the 12 year old and he was able to heal the woman who was bleeding, restoring not only her physical health but her status in society. It worked. But what about when it doesn't?

That is the tension in reading these stories isn't it? Any of the miracle stories, actually. It is so awesome and inspiring to hear about the power of Christ, but then we can look at our own lives and while we can all likely identify moments of grace when we have experienced blessing, we can also point to places in our lives where we prayed for a miracle, needed a miracle, and it didn't seem to happen. Children still died, diseases still ravaged, wars still raged, divisions still divided and dreams never did come true. So what is in this for us, what is in this for those of us who are still waiting for our miracles, what does this scripture have for us?

It would be easy for some to say that those of us still waiting for our miracles just don't have enough faith. But that isn't true. Sure, it was faith that sent Jairus and the unnamed bleeding woman to Jesus in the first place, but Jesus didn't take time to measure their faith before responding, Jesus didn't ask questions about their attendance at worship, their prayer life or their knowledge of scripture. He just was with them, as simple as that, he was with them. Faith brought them to him, but their faith wasn't measured when they arrived.

Another thing I think is interesting in these stories is that death had already happened, in some form when they arrived. The

religious leaders questioned Jairus as to why he would bother Jesus when the girl was already dead. And the bleeding woman, well she had already experienced a death of sorts ... she couldn't live a normal life, she was shunned and shut off from society, she was lonely, abandoned and she felt physically awful all the time. She had experienced the death of her life as she'd known it, the life as she had envisioned it, the life she wanted.

So death had already made its presence known. But even then, even while things were at their most hopeless, even when the day was at its darkest, they came to Jesus. They made room for Jesus. They let themselves get close to him, and they hoped for the best. They didn't even have to touch him. Their faith didn't even have to be that strong, they didn't even have to get that close. Just touching the hem of his garment was enough. Just touching something that had touched him was enough.

That is the real miracle. Think about that for a moment. At their darkest most desperate point, when faith was probably a challenge, they didn't even have to get that close. The woman only needed to touch something that had touched Jesus, and that was enough. And not only was that enough to heal her, it was enough for

Jesus to look at her and call her “daughter” part of his family, his beloved child, noticed and loved.

So while these stories can be a bit overwhelming and even discouraging for those still waiting for miracles, or for those who feel the time for miracles has passed, there is good news here. Even when death has come into our lives – in whatever form, even when things seem hopeless, even when it seems too late for a miracle, healing in some form, new life, is still possible. The story isn’t over. The miracle can still come. And we don’t need to have the strongest faith, we don’t have to be without doubt or sin, our faith won’t be measured against the faith of anyone else ... we just have to have enough courage, a grain of faith to let the love of Christ into our lives at those darkest times. And as the bleeding woman learned, it can be as simple as touching the hem of his cloak – or as simple as being around others who have faith, when you feel yours is waning, or listening to songs that speak to new life and love in a broken world, or sitting in silence with your heart crying out to God, words unformed. It can be as simple as letting the door of your heart stay open, just a crack.

Healing in some form will come. That miracle – being able to feel life again, to pick yourself up and get on with life again, to start over again – it will come. It won't erase the death that has happened. That 12 year old Jesus raised was, I'm sure, deeply changed by her experience. As were those who witnessed all she had gone through. But new life came. That woman, whose life was ruined by her illness, she had to rebuild everything. She had to re-enter her community, she had to work on forgiving those who had abandoned her, she had to regain her strength. She was forever changed. But new life came.

You too may be forever changed by whatever death, literal or figurative, has entered your life. But today you are reminded that new life will come. Maybe not in the ways you had once hoped, but in ways you now need. New life will come. No case is too hopeless. No situation is beyond redemption.

One of the wonderful things about our Gospel is that just when you think the story is over, a new chapter is just beginning. God is constantly at work, resisting endings, bringing new beginnings. And if we can muster even a kernel of faith, we will see that this is as true today as it was in Jesus' times. A new chapter of hope and new life is coming, for our community, and maybe even for you too. No case

is too hopeless for our God, no time is too troubled for God's intervention, no situation is beyond the redemptive power of God's love. Jesus came into very troubled times, and the Spirit of God continues to flow in and through our very troubled times. Troubled times are what God does best, remember. Do not fear, only believe. God is at work in our world, and God will be at work through us.

This is a gospel for our time, and it is time for us to be made well.