

“All Are Lifted Up”
Mark 5:21-43; Psalm 130
First Presbyterian Church
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There is no collection of writings that better displays the heights and depths of the human experience, as well as the highs and lows of the religious life, than the book of Psalms. They run the gamut from religious ecstasy to the depths of human despair. We see people struggling with fear, with pain, with loss, with joy, with life, and with death. There is almost no topic that the Book of Psalms doesn't address, because its authors are all human beings wrestling with the adversities and perversities of this life. There is no emotion or problem with which you are struggling at this moment that isn't reflected in at least one of the psalms.

We are human and the psalmists were human. We all experience the struggles and trials of life. Both the good and joyous experiences and the painful and fearful trials drive us to a realization that we need to live and walk with God. We learn through all those trials and joys that we are not alone in this world. We learn that we have a God who loves us and cares for us. What a joy it is to come to that realization, and how much better it makes life when we know him in Jesus Christ.

The passage from Mark shows us two people who are struggling with the uncertainties of life. The first is Jairus, a leader in his synagogue, who would be in the group of religious leaders who would have normally been opposed to Jesus. His authority came from adhering to the traditions of the Rabbis. New was not approved. Different was definitely off the table. Yet, Jairus was desperate. We all know what it feels like to have a child ill. It is scary, especially if they are very ill. In this case the young girl was knocking on death's door and her father would do about anything to protect her and help her heal.

Thus, he did the new and different. He ran to Jesus, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, the text says, to come heal his daughter. As always, Jesus has compassion on the man and agrees to go with him. On the way to Jairus' house, there is a crowd gathered around them, whether out of curiosity to see what Jesus would do, or whether it was a crowd that was just following Jesus around hoping to see miracles or to be fed. We don't really know. At any rate, it seems that Jesus is being shoved and pushed by the crowd as it milled around him.

In that crowd was another person whose need was also great. She was a nobody, especially because under Jewish law she was totally unclean since she was hemorrhaging, and her issue of blood made her untouchable. She knew that, but she was desperate. She thought that if in the press of that crowd, she could just sneak up behind Jesus and touch his robe, she would be healed, and nobody would be the wiser. How wrong she was. The moment she touched Jesus, she felt her body become whole, but Jesus also felt the healing power go from him to her, and therefore looked around to see who touched him.

When he asked, the disciples wondered if he had gone off his rocker. All sorts of people were touching him, but not with a faith that could draw healing power from him. When the woman, with fear in her eyes and in her voice, confessed that she had been the one, Christ was not

angry or put off by the fact that she was ritually unclean, but rather commended her for her faith. It was that faith in Jesus that had made her whole. She had found the fountain of life, and now she had a whole new life before her.

While all this was going on, can you imagine Jairus chomping at the bit to move on and deal with his daughter? What a relief it must have been when Jesus turned again to head for Jairus' house. But they were shortly met by a messenger who told Jairus his daughter had died, and he need bother Jesus no more. He must have been crushed, but Jesus told him to hang in there. All was not lost. Just have faith that God was in all this. Jairus had just seen a woman healed after 12 years of illness. Continue to have faith in the one who could do that.

When they reached Jairus' house, the professional mourners were already there. They were weeping and wailing with great intensity—after all, they thought they were getting paid to put on a performance. They mocked Jesus when he told them that the girl only slept. In response, Jesus threw them all out, and taking the mother and father and his closest disciples into the room, he took the girl by the hand and told her to arise. By touching a supposedly dead person, Jesus once again made himself ritually unclean, but that was of no concern to him. His love extended to the girl, and that love raised her once again to life and a return to her family.

He then does something that is surprising. He told them to tell no one. It was fine if everyone simply believed that they had been mistaken in thinking that she was dead. Why did he not want the word to get out? Wouldn't it raise his standing and prestige? In one way it might have, for people liked a miracle working, crowd feeding Messiah. As we will see later in Mark, that was the kind that Peter liked when he confessed Jesus to be the Christ. But that confession was only partially true. The idea that the Christ would have to suffer and die was yet to be understood, and would come later.

It would be wonderful to have Jesus around to deal with our health crises and illnesses—to heal us when we are on the brink of death. My father was an inorganic chemist, but also a man of faith. For him there was no conflict between science and religion, and if there seemed to be, it was because we didn't know enough about either science or religion. God still works miracles today, but many of them are through the skill and intelligence of persons learned in the sciences, but still raised up by God. For example, there were some during COVID who professed that Jesus was their vaccine and refused to be inoculated, but sadly many of them died. Many more availed themselves of the vaccines that were offered and either did not catch COVID or survived it if they did. That was God's hand on them through doctors that studied and listened to what was needed. The miracles of healing are still occurring, but many of them come through God's human agents, and yet they are no less miracles.

Life is confusing, no matter who we are. One of the great prophets of the Old Testament hated being a prophet. He was fed up with always being the voice of bad news, and there is a passage where he expresses his frustration, if not disgust, with his lot in life. The prophet is Jeremiah, and the passage where he shows how fed up he is in Jeremiah 20:7-18. It reads:

You pushed me into this, God, and I let you do it.
You were too much for me.
And now I'm a public joke.

They all poke fun at me.
Every time I open my mouth
I'm shouting, "Murder!" or "Rape!"
And all I get for my God-warnings
Are insults and contempt.
But if I say, "Forget it!
No more God Messages from me!"
The words are fire in my belly
A burning in my bones.
I am worn out trying to hold it in.
I can't do it any longer!
Then I hear whispering behind my back.
"There goes old 'Danger-Everywhere.' Shut him up! Report him!"
Old friends watch, hoping I'll fall flat on my face.
"One misstep and we'll have him. We'll get rid of him for good!"

But God, a most fierce warrior, is at my side.
Those who are after me will be sent sprawling—
Slapstick buffoons falling all over themselves,
A spectacle of humiliation no one will ever forget.

Oh, God-of-the-Angel-Armies, no one fools you.
You see through everyone, everything.
I want to see you pay them back for what they've done.
I rest my case with you.

Sing to God! All praise to God!
He saves the weak from the grip of the wicked.

Curse the day I was born!
The day my mother bore me—a curse on it, I say!
And curse the man who delivered the news to my father.
"You've got a new baby—a boy baby!"
(How happy it made him.)
Let that birth notice be blacked out, deleted from the records,
And the man who brought it haunted to his death with the bad news he brought.
He should have killed me before I was born, with that womb as my tomb,
My mother pregnant for the rest of her life with a baby dead in her womb.
Why, oh why, did I ever leave that womb?
Life's been nothing but trouble and tears,
And what's coming is more of the same.

Clearly no one is exempt from the vicissitudes of life, not even a prophet of the magnitude of Jeremiah. But did you notice that right in the middle of his laments and complaints, he affirms his faith in the living God. God is a "fierce warrior." He will pay back the "slapstick buffoons." "Sing to God! All praise to God! He saves the weak from the grip of the wicked." It is the return to the arms of God that can bring comfort and assurance in the midst of troubles. That is what

both Jairus and the woman with bleeding found when they let themselves be embraced by Jesus. As the Psalms show, virtually every human emotion can be expressed before God. He knows exactly what we are thinking and feeling. We don't have to hide it. We can express it without fear.

In the midst of anger, hurt, fear, depression, joy, or sorrow, however, we have to come back to the arms of Christ, for he is the only comfort that will see us through the trials of life. But why doesn't God intervene in these dark times in our lives? Why did he let our child die? Why did I lose my job? Why is my marriage in trouble? Why doesn't he fix it? Why are my children walking down dangerous paths and Christ is doing nothing about it? If these are your questions, and I suspect they are the questions we have all asked, then we all need to go back and either read the book or watch the movie called "*The Shack*." Flo Beth and I learned about it when we had the opportunity to attend the Presidential Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC, during Barak Obama's presidency. The speaker that day was William Paul Young, the author of "*The Shack*." It addresses all the questions we have asked today, as best as any human being can address them.

The book shows us that adversity is just a part of the human life and condition, and without the trials of life, none of us would grow. None of us would discover that we need help to get through this life. None of us would discover Christ and his love that led him to the cross for you and me. None of us would discover the Risen Christ who has overcome all that we are experiencing, including the death that awaits us all. There are no longer any barriers between him and us. We are his, and as we pass through the pains and hurts of life, we can know that he is with us and all that we face will be shown to be "slapstick buffoons" with no power over us.

The Psalmist's assurance was Jeremiah's and it is ours. I'm going to quote him again with a little variation.

Help, Jesus—the bottom has fallen out of my life! Master, hear my cry for help! Listen hard as you did to Jairus and the woman who needed you. Open your ears! Listen to my cries for mercy.

I pray to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—my life a prayer—and wait for what he'll say and do. My life's on the line before God, my Lord, waiting and watching till morning.

O people of First Presbyterian Church of Marshfield, Wisconsin, wait and watch for the Lord Jesus Christ. With his arrival comes love, with his arrival comes generous redemption from and in the midst of all our trials. No doubt about it—he'll redeem us all, buy us back from captivity to sin, suffering, sorrow, hurt, and all the dark places of life. We are never alone.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.