

“A SICK WOMAN AND A DEAD GIRL”

Scripture: Matthew 9:18-26

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The sermon title in the bulletin is “A Sick Woman and a Dead Girl.” Actually, in the section of my Bible from which this text is taken, it is listed as “A dead girl and a sick woman.” Well, it doesn’t matter. You will get the gist of it in my sermon. The text that is listed is Matthew 9. This story appears in all three of the synoptic gospels, but I chose to read from Luke because it has a lot more of the details that are actually in my sermon. In Luke 8, beginning at verse 40:

⁴⁰Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. ⁴¹Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house ⁴²because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. ⁴³And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

⁴⁵"Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."

⁴⁶But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."

⁴⁷Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

⁴⁹While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher any more."

⁵⁰Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."

⁵¹When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. ⁵²Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep."

⁵³They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" ⁵⁵Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Large crowds always followed Jesus everywhere He went. People were attracted to Him. People were amazed at His miracles. In the events preceding this Gospel lesson, Jesus calmed the

stormy seas for his frightened Disciples, and those who were in the boat with Him were equally amazed and wondered to each other: “Who is this that even the winds and the waves obey Him?”

He had healed the demon-possessed man and when people from the town came out to see what was going on and realized that Jesus had sent the demons out of that man into a herd of pigs, that in turn swarmed into the lake where they drowned, they were kind of upset. They were astonished to see the demon-possessed man in his right mind and dressed, but they were upset that the pigs had drowned in the lake. So they asked Jesus to leave, I guess because they were afraid of losing more pigs, and hence more income. But perhaps they sensed a power that they didn't understand. But whatever the reason, Jesus got into the boat and left.

In Matthew's account of this, chapter 9 begins with Jesus getting out of the boat again and healing a paralyzed man whose friends had brought him to Jesus. Probably they figured that Jesus was this man's last hope. When Jesus saw their faith, he healed the paralytic and he told him that his sins were forgiven, getting him into more trouble with the scribes and Pharisees — but then Jesus was always getting into trouble with the religious leaders of the day because He dared to go against the norm and question their authority by declaring His own authority to heal and to forgive sins. And the crowd was once more amazed that God had given such authority to human beings. When Jesus was criticized because of the kind of people with whom He associated, His reply was that those who were healthy were in no need of a physician:

I have come, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

So when Jairus came to ask for Jesus' help, the crowd probably wondered why somebody with such an important position in the Synagogue would come to this rabble rouser for help. But Jairus' daughter was at the point of death. According to Mark's account of this story he was desperate, and apparently his daughter's life was more important to him than any position in the Synagogue. Jairus came to Jesus in humility and fell at His feet, repeatedly begging Jesus to come and help his daughter:

Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.

So Jesus started out for Jairus' house. Both Mark and Luke's account of this story tell us that the press of the crowd almost crushed Jesus. And in that crowd there was someone else who had a great need. There was a woman who had been ill for twelve long years with an issue of blood, as the King James puts it. Because of this she was considered ceremonially unclean and anyone who touched her would also be ceremonially unclean. Hence she suffered the double whammy of being sick for so long and having to suffer in lonely isolation. But not only had she suffered this illness which had depleted her strength and energy, but she also had lost all her resources, for she had spent everything she had, going from one doctor to another for treatments that only made her worse, so in reality, she suffered a quadruple whammy. She was destitute, lonely and afraid. She also had heard of how Jesus had healed many people. She too had come in faith, but she had come hesitating, in secret, perhaps fearing yet another rejection. Maybe she feared the crowd would discover her problem and send her away. Mark tells us that she came up behind Jesus in the crowd and touched His cloak. One source I read suggested that this could have been

the fringe of the rabbinical prayer shawl that Jesus probably wore. But whatever she touched, she believed that if she could just touch His clothes, just the hem of His garment, she could be healed. So she reached out in faith to brush her fingertips against the hem of Jesus' robe, and we are told that she felt in her body that her suffering had ended. Then she retreated into the crowd, hopefully unnoticed. Immediately Jesus stopped and looked around. He recognized that healing power had gone out of Him. He stopped and asked, "Who touched me?"

The Disciples thought this was a little silly. "Oh, come on Lord. In the press of such a crowd, why do You ask such a question as this? Look at all these people!"

But Jesus knew that someone had reached out to Him in faith, that the power of God had gone out of Him into whoever had reached out to Him. For you see, no one ever reaches out to Jesus and goes unnoticed. Jesus kept looking around to see who touched had Him. And in the text I read that the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at His feet and in the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly healed. She didn't know what to expect. She could only wait and hope.

And Jesus' reaction to her was one of kindness and compassion. "Daughter." Chuck Swindoll says that such a tender address is not found anywhere else in Jesus' recorded words. "Daughter." He could see into the depths of this woman's soul, to the deep hurt, to the loneliness, to the rejection she had experienced, not to mention the physical pain.

Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.

I can just imagine the tears of thanksgiving welling up in that woman's eyes. The feeling of life and health had come surging back into her withered body. We aren't told what happened to the woman after this, but we do know that Jesus met her at her point of need. And while Jesus was still speaking, Mark tells us that some men from Jairus' house came to say that Jairus' daughter had died.

"Don't bother the teacher any more." . . . "There is no use for him to come; there is nothing more He can do now."

It never occurred to them that this man who had calmed angry waves, this man who had cast out demons, this man who had just ended a 12 year old illness, could also do something about that dead little girl. Perhaps none of them had been at Nain earlier to witness the miracle of resurrection there. Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe...."

When Jesus arrived at Jairus' house there was so much commotion with people weeping and wailing and mourning her death. And Jesus said, "What is all the commotion about? The child is not dead, but asleep."

That is, the child is not permanently dead, for Jesus knew what He was going to do but the people didn't, and they laughed at Him. This is not unlike the incident at Bethany when Lazarus died. Martha chided Jesus by saying, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." And even when Jesus said that Martha would see her brother again, Martha said, "Yes, I

know. My brother will rise again on the last day.”

To which Jesus replied, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me, though they die, they shall live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

Do you believe this? Even with this statement of Jesus’ authority over death, Martha could not believe that Jesus could actually raise someone from the dead. And the people at Jairus’ house were equally doubtful!

So Jesus put all the people outside and took the parents and went up to the room where the child was laid out. He took her by the hand and said, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up.” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about. And the people were completely astonished, just as Martha was when Lazarus came stumbling out of his tomb.

So what do we learn from these two stories? For one thing, we learn that in God’s eyes, there is no such thing as a hopeless situation; there is no such person as a helpless person. Jairus had come seeking healing for his daughter. The woman had come to what she thought was probably her last hope.

Of course there were skeptics; there always are. The men came telling Jairus not to bother the teacher anymore. Jesus’ own Disciples thought Him a little whacky to have questioned who touched Him in so large a crowd. But Jesus knew the difference in the jostling of the crowd press and the timid touch of faith. Those around Him ought to have realized that if this woman could be healed by so slight a brush of His garment, then surely He could do something for Jairus’ daughter.

There is another issue to consider here though: Sometimes we leave coming to the Lord for help to the very last thing that we do when it should be the first, the very first thought. In fact, there should be such an up-close and personal relationship with God that calling on Him in our time of trouble is as natural as thanking Him in the good times. The sick woman probably felt that since she had tried everything else, she might as well try Jesus. What did she have to lose? It didn’t matter to Jairus what anyone at the Synagogue thought; his child was sick and dying and he was desperate.

Aren’t we a little bit like this? Aren’t we a whole lot like this? We see what God has done for others and we long wistfully for the same kind of relationship and for similar miracles to bless our lives. Maybe we look for God in the wrong places. Maybe we think social position or political power or civic responsibilities will give us the inner peace that we so long to have. But when trouble comes, these things just don’t hold up. We have to humble ourselves at the feet of Jesus just like Jairus did. We have to reach out in faith just like the sick woman did, and when we do, He will say to us: Don’t be afraid; only believe. Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be afraid for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will uphold you by the saving grace of my right hand. Don’t be afraid, for in returning and resting you will be saved, and quietness and confidence will be your strength. Don’t be afraid; only believe.

There is a little praise chorus we used to sing in the Baptist Church when I was growing up. Goes something like this:

*Only believe; only believe.
All things are possible; only believe.
Only believe; only believe.
All things are possible. Only believe.*

Father, so many of us stand on the fringes of eternity, looking wistfully at those who have a deep personal relationship with You, wishing for the miracles that bless their lives to bless ours also, longing for the peace that passes understanding. Help us to reach out in faith. Help us not to be afraid, but to believe that You are able to do exceedingly, abundantly above anything we could ever ask or imagine, that Your Holy Spirit accurately interprets our tears before Your throne of grace. Thank You, Father.