

Pentecost 5B, Proper 8. Mark 5:21-43. June 27, 2021.

It's important to notice that by the standards accessible to us, Jesus doesn't get there in time. And in this respect, this story can show us something that is more true about us than it is about God. Jesus isn't out on a search for sick people to heal. The needs come to him. Jairus, a faithful leader of the synagogue, comes because his daughter is deathly ill. Jesus on the shore is faced with a massive crowd and a pressing need—a need that came to him unlooked for.

The need is dire enough that whatever Jesus was planning to do over there on the other side of the lake, he drops to go with Jairus. And as he rushes to meet this unlooked for need, the crowd continues to press upon him, until our chronically ill sister touches his robe and he feels the power go out of him. As a side note, we might wonder why Jesus stops. The woman has been healed, the work is done even if accidentally, and Jairus' daughter is hovering between life and death nearby. He could have rushed on, but he stops. I think I know why. Because this woman has been ill for twelve years, enduring much under many physicians. We know enough about chronic pain and illness, and enough about medicine's history of treating women, to know that a drive thru healing will not do, here. Because after twelve years and many physicians, our sister doesn't just need an affliction removed—she needs to be seen, fully, by the healer and by God as herself. Stopping to see her and talk with her isn't an unnecessary indulgence, because Jesus isn't there just to cure—he is there to make her whole.

But the fact is that this healing of the woman with hemorrhages is part of a story, from a human point of view, of why Jesus didn't make it to Jairus's daughter in time. And that's where I want to pause, because before we get to the second miracle, this moment is so true about us. We too find ourselves faced so often with too many obligations, too many discordant needs pulling us in too many directions. And the fact of the matter is that we can't meet all of them. To do what is required for one will mean pain somewhere else.

Our moral mythology has trained us to believe, at the level of reflex, that there is always a right answer in these situations. That there is some kind of infallible moral arithmetic we can do to get it right. And our sometimes rather adolescent habit of clutching to this mythology assures us that if we get the arithmetic wrong, we will quickly be able to find someone to blame. Understand, diagnosing moral failure is important, but as a means of understanding and changing ourselves and our world—not as a way of escaping difficult questions and answers. And the difficult truth is that in a fractured world, we will encounter situations that we cannot fix, tensions that cannot be resolved—competing obligations that cannot be made, in the moment, to cooperate. We will at times stop to help, and so end up being too late.

Sometimes that is indeed dramatic, a high stakes moral triage with even actual life and death on the line. More often, it's more subtle and prosaic. We find ourselves choosing between good work at a job that makes a difference and quality time with a family who needs us, or a volunteer opportunity that helps the community. We want to go to Springfield to advocate for what we believe is right—and we also need to rest and love. Perhaps we want to get more involved at church—and an ailing parent needs our presence and support. There are always too many genuine claims on us. We are sometimes going to be too late.

Now, all of that is true. But it isn't the whole truth. And it especially isn't the whole truth after the transformation of the gospel. Jesus is too late by our standards, but not by his. When he gets to Jairus' house, it looks hopeless. It looks so hopeless that even with his reputation as a healer, his suggestion that she would be well earns him derisive laughter. This is no problem for Jesus, who calls the girl back from the dead and orders her some lunch. Well, that's great for her, but in the same dilemma, we aren't Jesus. We don't have the ability to do the impossible to stitch

back together a fractured world. But by faith we can believe the truth, that the world isn't just fractured—it is also being redeemed. Not by us. We still will be mucking our way through, finding ourselves in situations with either too many or no right answers. But Jesus is still coming, not just to Jairus' daughter, and not just to us, but to the whole broken world. And while we will continue to see places that seem beyond hope, the coming Jesus brings redemption that we cannot make happen and don't fully understand. This is an unpopular opinion, but the hope of the gospel is that the world will be saved, but not by us. The redemption of the world is the work of God, in which we are invited to participate.

I think that this is finally liberating. At the least, it liberates us from the idolatry of believing that the salvation of the world depends on our personal righteousness, an idolatry which in turn means that we are the most important person in the world. It liberates us to do what is virtuous, to be the people God is calling us to be, to face the needs in front of us fully even as we try to make progress towards our long-term goals. I am not saying, "do what you want and let God sort the world out." I am saying that we are invited into God's work of redeeming the world, and that somehow even when we can find no reason to keep hoping, that redemption will continue. God has conquered even the grave. For God, there is no such thing as too late. Amen.