

Yr. B, Proper 8
July 1, 2018
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
1231 Words

Lessons: Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24
Psalm 30
2 Corinthians 8:7-15
Mark 5:21-43

It was not her turn. Jesus was on *another* mission when the hemorrhaging woman first saw him. He was enveloped in a crowd who clamored for his attention. Jesus was moved with pity for the synagogue leader who was begging, crying, and clinging to his dusty feet. And she was unclean—and that means unwelcome—standing at a distance. She was obeying the Law...*for now*.

“This is incredible!” she thought. How could a respectable man like Jairus prostrate himself at the feet of a controversial man like Jesus? Religious leaders ridicule Jesus as a sinner...possessed with demons. Religious leaders confront Jesus for breaking the Sabbath Law, the Laws for cleanliness, and the customs for fasting. Religious leaders dismiss Jesus for lounging with all the wrong people. So, why would this religious leader beg this religious reprobate...in public?

She heard the answer being whispered among the astonished crowd. “His little daughter is at the point of death.”

There’s nothing quite like fear to make you get down on your knees and pray. There’s nothing like fear to make you say and do embarrassing things. There’s nothing like fear to make you overlook laws and customs. Even a respected leader will cash in his dignity for a little daughter in need. Just ask Jairus.

Those of you who have met members of my family of origin know that my name has not always been Father Furman. You know that my original name was Furman Lee. My first name comes from my father. My middle name comes from his mother—my grandmother—Carrie Lee...Grandma Buck.

When I think of the woman in today’s Gospel story, I think of Grandma Buck. She did not have a hemorrhage like the woman in the story; but she had *faith* like the woman in the story. She kept her eye on Jesus, despite hardship and calamity. She kept her faith in Jesus, despite suffering and loss.

“The woman had endured much...and had spent all that she had.”

This applies both to the woman in the Gospel story and to my Grandma Buck. The woman in the Gospel ended up this way because of illness. Grandma Buck ended up this way because she became a widow with three young boys during the Great Depression.

These women are portraits of strength and courage and perseverance. They kept their eyes on Jesus, despite hardship and calamity. They kept their faith in Jesus, despite suffering and loss.

Some of Grandma Buck’s siblings told her to take her three boys to an orphanage because there was nothing else she could do. One sibling and her husband said, “Come live with us. We will find a way.” They kept their eyes on Jesus, despite hardship and calamity. They kept their faith in Jesus, despite suffering and loss.

One of the reasons we pray out loud in this service every week is to conspicuously surrender the needs of people, places and things over which we don’t have control. And to find the strength and courage to act faithfully in response to the needs of people, places, and things in ways that we *do have* some power and control.

Prayer is not just words; it is action...grounded in trust...and reaching out in love. For Jairus, it meant falling at the feet of Jesus and looking like a fool for his daughter's sake. For the woman, it meant pushing her way through the crowd to touch Jesus in order to be healed. For Carrie Lee, it meant not giving up hope *and* doing everything she could to support her new, large family of eight. For us, it means surrendering some things and picking up other things—in thought, word, and deed. Dear people, if you pray with your strength, your courage, and your perseverance, you will keep your eyes on Jesus because he is the personification of these virtues.

All our lives are made up of blessings and hardships. Our lives are comprised of graces and losses. They are often woven so tightly as to take our breath away. So, we give thanks to the Lord for the blessings of our lives. We cry out to the Lord for mercy in the midst of hardship. We pray for strength, courage, and perseverance to act faithfully. And we pray forgiveness for the ways we fall short. In all these things and in all these prayers, we keep our eyes on Jesus...we ground our faith in Jesus...we reach out our hands in love...with Jesus.

And so she did. According to Mark's Gospel, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. "If I could even touch his clothes, I could be made well." And she was.

The woman had to answer for what she had done. Just like Jairus, she fell to Jesus' feet, fearful and trembling, and she confessed the whole embarrassing truth. Notice that he did not blame her. Rather, he praised her strength, courage, and perseverance, saying, "Daughter, *your faith* has made you well."

Grandma Buck, and my great aunt and uncle raised six children altogether. My dad and his two brothers flourished. At 18 they all joined the military and fought in World War II. They all survived and came home to raise families of their own.

This week I learned a new story about my grandmother from my oldest sister. I learned that many years later, but before I was born, Grandma Buck came to live with my family. She continued to cook and sew as she had done since *my dad* was born.

And she continued to pray. My sister described to me how every morning she was the first one up, cooking hoecakes and grits. And then every morning, after breakfast she would go back to her room, shut the door, and read out loud the stories of the Bible. My sisters would tiptoe up and stand outside her bedroom door and listen. And then she would pray out loud, by name, for every member of her extended family.

Although Grandma Buck didn't know it, she was also passing on to her grandchildren the gift of prayer. She was teaching them how to keep your eye on Jesus...how to keep your faith in Jesus. Grandma Buck was showing my generation what it looks like to live with gratitude, strength, courage, and perseverance.

In today's Gospel story, Jesus did not take credit for anything, even though he responded faithfully and encouragingly to everyone who asked for his help. He also challenged the onlookers to take action and get involved. "Give the little girl something to eat," he said.

The Good News of this Gospel of Jesus Christ is that he has shown us how to live—surrendering the things we cannot control; and taking action on the things we can. Both of these constitute a life of prayer.

You don't need fancy words. You can simply name before God, as honestly as you can, your blessings and thanksgivings, your requests and your regrets, your hopes and your fears. God knows them already. But in naming them, our hearts will become more open, And our awareness will be clearer. And we will discover how to respond with our gratitude, strength, courage, and perseverance.

Prayer helps us keep our eyes on Jesus and recognize when it is our turn...so that we may take action and live more nearly as we pray.

Amen.