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“Just Trust Me”

A sermon by Peter Hausmann

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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Psalm 30, Mark 5:21-43

Several weeks ago my brother was brought back to life. He was in the hospital when something went wrong in a “routine” procedure; he lost over a liter of blood, and died. When he woke up later all he could remember was a heavy weight on his chest while the medical staff revived him. And then later sitting up and asking for food and drink.

In my brother’s story we have much of the content of Mark 5. There is death, blood, resurrection, and food. But in Mark’s account there is also a dance between privilege and isolation as God shows us up in several different lives. The first eight chapters of Mark reinforce the power of God in Jesus among ALL the worlds’ people. In chapter 4 Mark tells of Jesus crossing over the Sea of Galilee from the land of the Jews to the dangerous land of the Gentiles. On their way a great windstorm arises, threatening their lives to the point that they call out to Jesus, who is sleeping in the stern of the boat, “Teacher do you not care that we are perishing?” *Do you not care that we are perishing?* Chapter five is an answer

to that question. First Jesus stops the wind with a word, and asks the disciples, “why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” No, no they don’t, not really, they miss it but Jesus just keeps pressing on.

Next, to further prove that he cares that we are perishing, Jesus heals a forsaken mad man sleeping among the tombstones next to a pig farm. He literally clears his mind of many voices that were causing him to lash out at others and himself. Instead of self harm the man is wanting to help others. The crowds ogle at Jesus’ power but out of fear they drive him back across the lake to the “holy” land where today’s account of two more healings takes place. Jesus cares so much about us that he darts back and forth between the outsiders, insiders, moving from clean to unclean, bringing order out of our chaos, even if for a moment, because that’s what God does.

Jairus is the pinnacle of insider, he was a leader in the synagogue, a real clean living man. He was high up in the group that was threatened by Jesus. Yet with everything else going right in his life, this powerful man is at his wits’ end because his daughter is dying and all the King's horses and all the King's men can’t put her back together again. But maybe, just maybe, he seems to think, maybe Jesus could do something ... It’s hard to understate how shocking this would be, as Jairus publicly falls at Jesus’ feet for help. Imagine Franklin Graham pleading for help on his knees before a trans Latinx minister from a mainline denomination and you get the scandal for Jairus. All his pride stripped away, for his daughter

whom he loves. So in this moment Jairus and the bleeding woman are equals in a crowd, both at the feet of Jesus looking for help.

Unlike Jairus this woman is not named. She has been suffering for at least twelve years. Twelve years with a condition that literally saps your life force. Twelve years fighting and clawing and losing. Losing money, health, purpose, and friends. A bleeding woman, according to Leviticus, is unclean. Untouchable. And if you do touch her, even by accident, or if she touches you, you too are unclean, you must strip, bathe, and wait until sundown until your reenter the community. Can you imagine? And only then if you yourself aren't bleeding, which meant that for her with a twelve year flow she could never catch a break long enough to shower and come back inside. Always on the outside and alone.

Mark intentionally intersects the path of a man of means and the path of a de-meant woman at the feet of Jesus. Mark is showing us that the power of God, the gospel of God for us, is for ALL of us, both for the privileged and the isolated. Just as he intersects the story of the gentile across the sea and the god-fearing folk close to home. God is for both the insider and the outsider, for all who feel that they are perishing.

On top of that Jesus allows outsiders to trump the insiders sometimes. Jesus on his way to Jairus' house seeks out the woman who touched him, because her healing was not just about blood finally clotting, it was also about being

brought back into the fold. He makes a point of bringing her into the light, face to face instead of hidden, hearing her story and restoring her peace, in public. She is okay again. He does this for her and for the crowd. The same people who would have shunned her moments before could now see Jesus respond to her unclean and uninvited touch with kindness, normality, and restoration. But by taking time for the unclean bleeding lady, Jesus missed the chance to stop Jairus' daughter from dying. While still talking to the woman messengers come from Jairus' house to say it's too late don't waste the teacher's time. What flashed through Jairus' mind in this moment? Have you ever felt the flash of fury at someone who pulled in front of you, in line, in traffic, at work, in your family? What about me?

Now we don't know that is how Jairus felt. But it's what I felt every time I read this story. Will there be enough for me, for my people? Seems that that sentiment may be behind a lot of what is happening in the world right now, the same old story of scarcity, of fear, of unbelief. Draw up the covers, close the borders, keep out the other. But Jesus' actions lead in the opposite direction. Jesus' words to Jairus lead in the opposite direction of tight fisted scarcity. "Do not fear, only believe." To Jairus he said, "Do not fear only believe." To us he says, "Do not fear, only believe." God Almighty, that really hard when it really matters.

And what is it we are supposed to believe anyway? Do any these folks in Mark get into a place of prayerful belief and fearlessness? Do any of them show us a foolproof pattern of prayer to deeper belief? No, but it does seem that almost anything counts as a move toward God here in Mark 5. On the sea the

disciples whine at Jesus and he helps and berates them for their fear unbelief; the man in the tombs doesn't actually ask for help, but the demons that held him down believe that he's powerful enough to end their existence, so they asked for mercy, yet they and some pigs still perished; later the man asks to go with Jesus, but Jesus says no, and the man goes on to tell folks far and wide what God had done for him though Jesus; the bleeding woman takes from Jesus without asking, then in fear confesses what she has done and Jesus commend her for her faith; and Jairus is the calmest, most prayer like in his request, "my little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her that she may be made will, and live." But she dies.

Barbara Brown Taylor in *Bread of Heaven*, (p 139) says that if Jairus really could believe and not fear, then he "could have survived whatever happened next, even if Jesus had walked into his daughter's room, closed her eyes with his fingertips, and pulled the sheet over her head. Trusting that she was still in God's good hands, even though she had slipped through his." But who knows what was going on in his head. Either way, Jesus revived her.

"Do not fear, only believe" belief seems to be something more akin to trusting that God is God though all the world may be coming apart. And sometimes it does come apart and the healing doesn't come. Sometimes the children at the border are turned away or worse. Sometimes our rage isn't enough to change things. Sometimes we have strokes right after recovering from heart attacks. Sometimes the bad guys do good things. Sometimes our side loses

big time and for 12 years. Jesus' words "Do not fear, only believe." are for us, as individuals, as churches, as nations.

There is a deep intimacy to this exhortation to not fear but believe, one which we each have, are, or will face in our lifetimes and our death times. But there is also a call to be that word to one another, as Jesus is, did, and will call us to be through his Holy Spirit. Sometimes we have faith FOR as well as WITH other people to find healing. Which is why we shelter the exile, why we show up in worship, why we visit those in prison, why we sit with the suffering, why we feed the hungry, why we pray with the faithless, even and especially if they are us, why we actively put on belief like a garment even as we peel off fear and put it in the hamper. Because we follow a God who did these very things for us in the person of Jesus the Christ. God is God and we are not, but God is for us, is that enough both to console us and to propel us to go and minister, heal, touch, speak, resist, and persist as did Jesus for those far and wide? "Do not fear, only believe."

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