

## Then and Now

Beaverkill Church Message, June 27, 2021

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*It's a great day for the race!* Now you say, “*What race?*” The human race! That's a corny old Cerny joke, but it takes on special meaning this year when all of humanity faces the various strains of Coronavirus. And it also is the way you may feel right after 15-plus months of hibernation, isolation, and a real fear of social interaction that has spread right along with the virus. What used to be easy no longer is. Yet *finally* this month here we are back together in our beloved little church, no longer just out with the ghosts in the graveyard. At least to me, so many signs of spring seemed more beautiful than ever this year. Daffodils galore, peonies, mountain laurel, lilacs, wrens' and doves' songs, lightning bugs, even those tiny little yellow paintbrush flowers in the cemetery seemed lovelier and more abundant than ever. Day by day the world is opening up—and we pray it continues. Ed and I went to our first in-person concert last week, restaurants are open, and families and friends are finally able to be with each other. The last few weeks I have noticed that Mary dutifully has reminded us there would be no touching with the passing of the peace . . . but then again, many of us snuck in our own hugs and handshakes before the service began. The truth is that we *need* that social connection.

The church lessons these past two weeks, I think, also reflect the tension between fear and faith, between weakness and the power of belief. Last week Mary gave us a Malcolm Gladwell insight on one of our favorite stories—that of David and Goliath. The obvious underdog, David should have been terrified, as King Saul was, but he was filled with the spirit and power of God, a far greater protection than Saul's oversized armor. With just his slingshot, five small, smooth Beaverkill-style river stones, and his own new game plan, David slew Goliath and the Philistines.

Last week's new testament reading, you may remember, created an equally vivid picture of the tension between fear and faith. Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a small boat, and a storm arose. Let me read the passage for you:

*A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he [Jesus] was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"*

The disciples feared the storm—as we might. But Jesus was relaxed and filled with God's power. He could sleep through the storm, and then,

awakening, calm the wind, waves, and even his disciples. Fear was vanquished—*Jesus 1, storm 0*.

Now turning to this morning's Gospel, Mark gives us *two* tales of healing and faith enfolded in it. The first one is the only Bible story I am aware of where Jesus healed apparently *unintentionally*, here because of the faith of a woman who had been hemorrhaging for many years. The “unclean” woman overcame her own misery and fear, and she reached out to touch Jesus' cloak, believing that if she could but touch him, he would heal her. When she did so, Jesus was “immediately aware that power had gone out from him.” I love this image of his power whooshing outward. It appeared to be *automatic*, not *intentional*, healing. When she came to Jesus and told him what had happened, Jesus answered, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

*Beautiful* words!

The second story both precedes and follows the tale of the hemorrhaging woman. One of the leaders of the local synagogue, Jairus, when he saw Jesus, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." Again, we feel the power of touch, the laying on of hands, the direct connection. But here the story shifts, because Jairus now is told his daughter is *already* dead and Jesus is too late. Still, Jesus goes to

“heal” the daughter anyway. When they arrived, remember, the people of Jairus’ household were weeping and wailing loudly, lamenting her death. Even so, Jesus’ faith remains strong. Undeterred, he goes in to her and takes her by the hand—again, *direct touch*—and speaks to her. She gets up and begins to walk. He reports that she was not dead but only sleeping. This time his faith and healing powers overcome even death. The ending of the passage is wonderfully “everyday” simple: “he told them to give her something to eat.” We *relate* to that!

So here we are now, thinking about these Bible stories, and they seem doubly meaningful as we also heal, one small step at a time, from the shrunken world we have been living in to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Have you experienced, as I have, the fear of doing things for the first time that you have not done for months and months? For example, when Ed and I flew for the first time, I was nervous—but our desire to visit our Colorado grandchildren and to bury Ed’s mother’s ashes alongside his dad’s there was *stronger than* our fear, just as the woman’s was in reaching for Jesus’ cloak in this morning’s reading.

And our uncertainty about what is safe is the same everywhere worldwide right now. Our friends abroad tell us they are, no pun intended, very much in the same boat. Each morning demands a resolute leap of faith just to do what used to be taken for granted. Not all of our neighbors can

make that leap of faith yet, but I know you do, because you are here this morning! When you go to a live meeting or concert or game or, this week, *graduation* or take a bus or have friends over for dinner or do something that seemed so simple two years ago, isn't it somehow far more daunting today? Each of us has our own individual and *changing* comfort zone. We know intuitively, and research has proven, that human beings, from infants to the elderly, become mentally and physically stronger both with human touch and with social interaction, and we all have been without it. Please know that I am not criticizing the need for COVID restrictions, but I am hoping that we are now in a period of recovery that also holds the power of healing in it, much as these lessons do if we let them. Maybe it will be slow, small "baby steps" forward, but perhaps our belief in faith and healing and this particular collection of readings can help. Strengthened by our faith, with a little help from our friends and the vaccines, we can cherish the beautiful Beaverkill spring and now the unfolding of summer, and, God willing, grow, heal, and expand our lives anew. *If* we do, it truly *is* "a great day for the race!"