

Prayer

“O Great Spirit, when we walk the path of beauty with sincerity, honesty, courage and truthfulness, we are like the upright basket which can hold the fruit of harvest. We can receive and share blessings abundantly. But when we have strayed from the beauty path and are not trustworthy, honest or reliable, we are like the basket turned over. We cannot contain, receive or give of the many blessings of life. When we are upside down we are empty and useless. Help us to always be upright, to receive and share the blessings of life in your holy and blessed name. Amen.”¹

¹ Source: Cal-Pac Annual Conference Worship Service

Message: From Fear to Hope**“What are you afraid of?”**

There are all kinds of fears. Some of us are afraid of insects – spiders, wasps and the like. Others may fear snakes or reptiles. These are fears of the natural world. Fears of disease and illness are also fears of the natural world. Other fears might include thunderstorms, tornadoes, wildfire or earthquakes. They remind us that we are small in comparison to the world we live in. Other fears are specific to the situations and circumstances we experience in life. For example, some of us are afraid of the dark, while some of us fear the actions of other people – threatening or not. These fears remind us that we are not in control of the world around us. We influence others, but do not control them. Finally, we all fear things that debilitate us: serious injury, long-term illness like cancer or heart disease, mental health issues, Alzheimer’s and more. These fears remind us we are mortal. In Psalm 130 and Mark 5:21-43, God gives us hope when we are afraid.

Mark tells us about Jesus’ encounter with two women as he returned home to Capernaum. The stories are “sandwiched” together. Jesus first encounters a local synagogue leader Jairus, who begs Jesus to come to his house so he can lay hands on his young daughter and make her well. On the way to Jairus’ house, Jesus has an interaction with an older, unnamed woman. This is a very real and human situation, which leaves us in suspense. We read about Jesus’ encounter with the woman, knowing time is running out for the girl. There is no doubt the two stories are interrelated. We share in the tension and concern of Jairus and his family, but are taught a lesson on the importance of faith and waiting for the Lord, no matter how long it takes. This helps prepare us for the amazing gift of redemption, not mourning and the empty assurances of the world. Jesus restores our lives, families, community of faith and nation in his time and in a manner that gives glory to God.

The meat of the sandwich is found in Mark 5:36, when Jesus says, “Do not fear, only believe.” Jesus ignores those who bring bad news to Jairus. He knows the man’s worst fears have just been realized. And he knows Jairus is probably thinking to himself, “if only he had come right away, without delaying to help that woman.” Through his actions, Jesus

reaffirms the lesson of Psalm 130:6, *“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.”*

No matter how dire the situation may seem, Jesus shows us we must wait for God with hope. Those who are afraid of the dark, hope for the light of dawn to dispel their fears. Our hope in Jesus is greater than that, more than twice as strong and deep.

Our faith in Jesus will sustain us through the trials and challenges of life, no matter how many years it takes. Our faith in Jesus will sustain us when the intensity of our pain and suffering steals our breath away and threatens to steal our very lives and essence. Our faith in Jesus will sustain us when stress and confusion confound and perplex us and those who love and care for us. Believe in Jesus and do not fear.

The life of the older woman and the young woman are intertwined because of their encounter with Jesus. The older woman was outcast from society. Due to the nature of her condition, she was perpetually unclean and others would not want to come in contact with her. That means she would have been a prisoner in one room of her home, unable to interact with family in a normal way. There was no lessening of her condition. It went on, each and every day, for twelve, long years.

It’s similar to those today who are isolated because of age, disability or other factors. We all know someone who suffered - physically, mentally or emotionally, for a long period of time. Perhaps we have experienced isolation or a long period waiting for an answer to prayer. Waiting is hard. Even if you have faith, waiting is hard. At some point, despair kicks in. We are willing to try anything to make a difference.

That’s what happened to the woman in Mark’s narrative: she was willing to try anything. Her hope won out over her fear. There’s no doubt she was afraid. By leaving her house, she was leaving her place of comfort and isolation. By entering the large crowd, she was coming into contact with others, making them unclean, which would have significant ramifications. By reaching out to touch Jesus’ cloak from behind, she was taking a chance. The risk of making the Teacher unclean was outweighed by her belief in Jesus’ power to heal.

The woman didn't know Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah. The passage doesn't tell us that. The woman believed in Jesus in a pure, simple way. She risked everything with the hope of being restored.

A wonderful thing happened. As soon as the woman touched Jesus' cloak, she felt the change in her body. She was healed! Praise God! Then the worst thing happened: Jesus stopped and said, “*Who touched me?*” (v30). This is a remarkable thing to say. It's remarkable for a couple of reasons.

First, it shows us Jesus knew what happened. We are told Jesus “*knew power had gone out from him*” in v30. The uncleanness did not corrupt Jesus. Instead, divine power came out of Jesus, through the touching of his clothes. The power healed the woman without a word or gesture, by God's mercy and uncommon love.

Second, it shows us the reality of Jesus' humanity. Jesus could have revealed his divine knowledge of what happened. Instead, we have a demonstration of Jesus' human nature. Someone touched him in a large crowd and he asked who did it. The disciple's response is incredulous. They basically said “*are you kidding?*” in v31. This interaction shows us Jesus is human and divine, two in one, seamlessly God and human. The human side of Jesus isn't hard for us to embrace today. We struggle to accept Jesus' divinity and authority over our lives. Our fears are similar to the woman's: we furtively reach out to Jesus, hoping our fears will go away if we can somehow touch God, even indirectly.

The jig was up and the woman knew it. She knew she could be stoned to death for what she did, but she knew better than to run away. Anyone who could heal through their clothing would know who touched them. She fell down before Jesus and told him the truth, waiting for judgment.

The wonderful thing was made complete. Rather than judgment and condemnation, Jesus fulfilled her greatest hope. Jesus restored her, completely and wholly. Not only was the woman healed of her physical condition, Jesus offered assurance. The woman's faith was true. Jesus affirmed what she already knew: she was healed. Then Jesus added “*go in peace.*” There would be no judgment or punishment. The woman was free to go home. She could once again be part of her family, no

longer isolated and alone. Healed in front of a leader of the synagogue, she was restored to the community of faith. She is once again part of the nation of Israel, no longer outcast. Her healing is a wonderful lesson on waiting for the Lord with hope.

There’s a second part to the story, though. And it’s still in suspense. The woman’s faith led her to Jesus’ healing touch, restoration and wholeness. But the young woman didn’t have the same opportunity. Nowhere in the narrative do we hear anything about her faith. In fact, her father Jairus seems to be the one whose faith is at stake.

Jairus was a leader of the Jewish synagogue in Capernaum. Jesus taught in the synagogue; we know that from Mark 1:21 and other passages. Jairus knew who Jesus was. He knew what Jesus taught. He knew the temple authorities were questioning Jesus’ teaching and actions. Jesus was a problem for Jairus – politically, theologically and personally. Jairus had no reason to come to Jesus publically except one: his daughter was very ill and he loved her very much. So Jairus did the one thing left to him. Jairus went to Jesus and asked him to heal his daughter, most likely against the advice of friends and family. Mark’s gospel tells us he “*begged Jesus repeatedly*” in v23. Clearly, this is a man who is at the end of his rope. He is willing to reach out to someone he’s not sure of in hope. Jairus is clearly a man in the dark, searching for some light and very afraid.

Jairus’ heart must have broken when people came to him from his house with bad news: your daughter died. Don’t trouble Jesus anymore. In effect, they were saying, “see, you were foolish to hope Jesus might help.” This is a very real, human element in the story. Friends and family don’t understand why we reach out to Christ. After all, God is dead. Or God is distant and uncaring. We’re foolish to put our hope in a 2,000 year old story about an ancient holy man from a country so far from us in time and culture that we can’t really understand what he was saying.

And yet Jesus’ response to Jairus is the key to life and hope, “*Do not fear, only believe.*” Regardless of what anyone else says, believe in Jesus. Our belief in Jesus is what sustains us in the darkest of nights. Our belief in Jesus assures us the dawn will come. Our belief in Jesus

will give us the patience to wait through the pain, suffering and trauma of life. Our belief in Jesus will raise the dead.

You see, Jesus’ actions back up his words. Jesus goes to Jairus’ house. He kicks the naysayers out. Jesus takes the parents, Peter, James and John with him in to see the young woman. **A wonderful thing happens.** Jesus resurrects the young woman, raising her from the dead. He restores the young woman to her family, community of faith and nation. In her is the promise of the future.

Jesus actions that day give us hope in two ways. First, when we are lost, overwhelmed by the circumstances of our life, faith in Jesus will help us to wait patiently for God. God will deliver and restore us from the “living death” of our loneliness and isolation; our life in sin. We will never be shamed or judged for reaching out to God in hope, no matter how tentatively or fearfully we may do so. Jesus will affirm and assure us. He will lift us out of our fear and into the light of life. Jesus will make us whole and restore us in ways we could only hope for.

Second, God will restore us from true death when he comes on the final day. No matter how long it takes, no matter what the delay, Jesus will come. Jesus will restore us to life in the very presence of those who love and care for us. Our family includes those who, like us, are adopted into God’s family. Everyone will be amazed at the wonders God does when we are resurrected from the dead to new life in heaven, filled with light and joy.

Let us not fear the darkness that surrounds us, no matter what it’s source may be, for we have hope. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, for he is the Light. Believe in him and do not fear. The Son of God came to earth to save, redeem and restore us, not to ignore, punish or judge us when we reach out in faith. We have seen the dawn and it holds the promise of the coming glorious, wondrous day. Let us hold onto it with hope and prayer as we wait patiently for the Lord.

Psalm 130 (NRSV)

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you,
O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is
forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the LORD,
my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more
than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for
the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is
steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will
redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Mark 5:21-43 (NRSV)

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd
gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of
the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, 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.” So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and
pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering
from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many
physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but
rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him
in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his
clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and
she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately
aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the
crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to
him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who
touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the
woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling,
fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her,
“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of
your disease.” While he was still speaking, some people came from the
leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher
any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of
the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” He allowed no one to follow

him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.