

6 Pentecost 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 Mark 5:21-43
Christ and Grace July 1, 2018
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It's been another rough week. I despair of even checking on the news of the day anymore. Another shooting, this week in a newsroom in Annapolis, Supreme Court controversies, travel bans, continued chaos over immigration policies, and innocent children suffering separation from their parents. And some of us cannot even get to that level of concern because we are so consumed by problems we are facing in our personal lives. Take a moment to name before God what is troubling your heart right now.

In talking with family, friends, and parishioners I notice that I am not alone in the anxiety and weariness of carrying the burdens of this world in my heart. Many of us are feeling pressed in by the crowds. There is so much dissention, so much suffering, so much in need of healing. How do we get through it all? We follow Jesus.

I want to offer a disclaimer here - I am not one to preach politics – because who needs to preach politics when you can preach the Gospel? We may see Jesus as either a meek and mild non-voter, or as a champion for our own political view. But to hold either view alone would be to put Jesus in a box, and really, that is impossible. In the Episcopal Church we are intentional about *not* doing that. I just saw a meme the other day that said: we find our unity in shared worship, not in enforced agreement. And on the main page of our website we say this: “We are diverse in our theological and social positions but find that being together in worship, fellowship and service is more important than strict uniformity in the belief and practice of our faith. We pray and strive to let Jesus be our guide as we seek to love God and our neighbors as ourselves.” We follow Jesus.

The obvious division of opinion in our nation, most likely extends into our Christ & Grace community. While we all have our own opinions about how our nation is governed and what are the best decisions for the good of the whole, our scripture today, if we have ears to listen, tells us how we as followers of Jesus are called to respond.

And as we approach the 4th of July, Independence Day, perhaps it is helpful for us to hear again the foundational statement in the Declaration of Independence – “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Most of us can recite this from memory. This sentence is the moral standard for our country, always reminding us that everyone has an equal right to life and liberty, though only to the extent that they do not compromise the rights of others. And isn't that where things get complicated?

The Gospel is filled with examples of Jesus healing the poor and the outcast; loving those others would exclude, liberating them from demons, restoring them to new life. As followers of Jesus we hear every week in the Gospel, how Jesus brings life and liberty equally to all, though it might make us uncomfortable when we hear it in light of the events that have been unfolding in our country lately. Is it a coincidence that our Gospel reading this week is about Jesus healing the sick when our nation shows so many symptoms of sickness? Is it a coincidence that Jesus healed not only the daughter of the wealthy, socially acceptable synagogue leader named Jairus,

but also a woman who was considered unclean, who was unwanted and cast out to the margins of society?

But Jesus shows no partiality. Despite being pressed in by the crowds, he responded to the frantic plea of a father whose greatest fear was becoming a reality. His daughter was dying. Jairus, important leader of the synagogue, fell at the feet of Jesus, letting go of all pride and pretense, and begged Jesus 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.” Jesus believed this child was worthy of healing and grace.

But the crowd pressed in even more and a woman suffering and made unclean from hemorrhages for 12 years, who had no more money for physicians, no more resources, no other alternatives, came up behind Jesus and touched his cloak, knowing that it would be enough for her healing.

But it was *not* enough for Jesus! Jesus was immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, so he turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “Are you kidding? Do you see this crowd pressing in on you? How can you say, ‘Who touched me?’ Let it go, Jesus!” The disciples did not yet grasp the importance of touch. But the woman who had just been healed, now knew *exactly* how important touch was! She returned and told Jesus her truth, sharing her story with him. A relationship was formed - Jesus called her daughter. Jesus believed this outcast woman was worthy of healing, worthy of acceptance as a child of God. Then Jesus followed Jairus home and despite the crowd’s opinion that the girl was dead, Jesus touched the little girl, he took her by the hand, and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!”

What is the common thread in these two healing stories of a woman and a girl from opposite ends of the cultural and economic spectrum? The common thread is that Jesus believed they were *both* worthy of healing and grace, *both* daughters of God. Jesus listened to their stories and he touched them, and in doing so drew them into a relationship with him, and put both women back into relationship with their community. There are no political sides or limits to the grace of God.

Yes, in our nation there are tensions that will not be eased overnight; and certainly not solved as long as we insist on focusing more on our divisions than on the good of the whole. Jesus did not come to take sides on legal and political issues but to help us see beyond them, to the larger reality of a kingdom where all will be seen as children of God, where all will be healed and made whole.

Jesus modeled healing and love through community – a community that is formed only as we are willing to listen to one another’s stories, as we are willing to touch the lives of others, and to allow ourselves to be touched by the needs of the world. Perhaps if the followers of Jesus did more of this, then we would not find ourselves with such differences of opinion on what the government should and should not be doing.

The Apostle Paul sums it up well in his words to the Corinthians – which are also words to us - “I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a

fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.”¹ Both Paul and Jesus insist on relationship, insisted that we are all equal in the eyes of God.

To follow Jesus means that we will touch one another’s lives in ways that will bring healing. One way we can do this is to help with our ministry at the Hope Center. We have two opportunities in July to follow Jesus. We can offer to make dessert ahead of time, help assemble the meal here at church that morning, or go over to the Hope Center to serve those who are hungry that day. Any or all of these will bring about healing exactly where it is needed.

In these days when it seems the world is pressing in on us from every direction, what can we do? We follow Jesus. The crowd is always pressing in. Jesus asked the crowd that day, “Who touched my clothes?” Jesus is asking us today, “Who has touched you, and whom are you touching?” Jesus took the little girl by the hand and said, “Talitha cum, little girl, get up!” Jesus is taking all of us by the hand and saying to us, “Church, get up!” Get up and follow Jesus.

Amen.

¹ NRSV, 2 Corinthians 8:13-14.