

PILGRIM

CHURCH

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

NEW LIFE

Mark 5:21-43 June 28, 2009

Pilgrim Bud Precise

Jairus, one of the leaders of the synagogue comes to Jesus to ask for help with one he loves. He is one of many people who have come to Jesus – not for themselves – but for someone they love. He assumes a position that is probably not one he is accustomed to. He falls on his knees and begs. “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well.” Jesus goes with him.

His journey is interrupted by a woman who has suffered much for twelve years – she has spent all her money and is not better, but worse. The scene seems to present doctors in a bad light – but I think that need not be the case. We older people know about healing. When we were young the doctor could make us well. As we grow older- well one seventy year old said it well, “after a certain age, you are not really well, just less sick.” The woman has heard of the reputation of Jesus. Maybe she knows the story of him touching the lepers and making them well. She didn’t want to bother Jesus – if she could just touch his garment, she would be made well. She manages to do touch his garment and is made well. But Jesus stops. “Who touched my clothes?” The disciples looked at the crowd pressing around him and were probably amused. “Just look at the crowd. How can you ask, ‘Who touched my garment?’” The woman – in fear and trembling – admits she touched his garment. Remember the disciples last week after Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee? That text says, “They were afraid.”

In his conversation with the woman, Jesus makes it clear that he does not have a magic garment. Healing represents the healing presence of God. It is her trust in the power of God that has made her well.

Friends of Jairus come up at this time and tell Jairus that his daughter is dead, that he doesn’t need to trouble Jesus any further. Jesus tells Jairus that they will go check on his daughter. When they get to his house Jesus tells the crowd that the child is sleeping. The text actually says, “They laughed at him.” As a child or an adult, it is discouraging when people laugh at you for trying to do the right thing. Jesus goes in and takes the girl by the hand and asks her to get up. She gets up and Jesus asks them to bring her some food.

Two miracle stories in our text for today. They both bring new life. They both reach out to people in need. I doubt that we Christians base our faith in Jesus on miracles. Our faith and our healing come after the fact. Sometimes the person we care for and love and want made well does not get well. . Sometimes it is, as we as families learn to remember with gratitude the person we have lost that we discover our faith, and our healing.

Jairus comes to Jesus and asks him, “Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well.” It was at my ordination. The bishop laid his hands on my head. He said, “Take the authority to read the gospel and preach the word. Take the authority to administer the sacraments to the congregation.” Earlier he had asked if those of us being ordained would teach the children in the places we were sent to serve. He asked if we would visit the sick. He asked if we would spend our time wisely doing the work of the church.

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I want you to understand that I don't believe that we have to have a bishop lay his hands on our head and ordain us to – in the words of Jairus – “Come, lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well.” I believe that is always the call of those in the church as we try to live out our faith. That task is always before us – and we need to be about it.

How and when do we lay our hands on someone and make them well? How do we offer “New life?” I believe when we give a child or an adult a book that we think is important that we are laying our hands on their head. I believe that every time we bring our food for the Greater Birmingham Ministries Food Pantry, we are laying our hands on those who need food. I believe that when our church sponsors a table at the Gay Pride Week, we are laying our hands on those who need our acceptance and encouragement. I believe when we cook and serve food at the Firehouse Shelter, we are laying our hands on those who need not only food, but the caring and acknowledgment of our community. They are not invisible. I believe when we serve on community agencies and church committees, we are laying our hands on those who need our help. I believe when we teach our children and adults that racism is not acceptable that we are laying our hands on the heads of those who need to learn and on those who need to be recognized as people of worth. When we make a phone call about a person needing a job, when we reach out to those coming out of prison, we are laying our hands on them to help them live. You can add much to this list.

I want us to understand that in our “Laying on of hands” we are offering new life. “Jesus, lay your hands on my little daughter that she may be made well, and live.” “If I can touch his garment, I will be made well. I think our text today is really about new life – a new day – a call to us in the present.

The 1984 film “Footloose” tells the story of bringing new life to a small rural town. It is the story of Ren McCormack and his struggle to bring dance back to a sorrowing small town. In a powerful scene in the movie, he is defending the Senior Class in its desire to have a prom. The town Council has passed a law against dancing. The minister of the local church preaches that dancing is a sin. Ren stands before the town council. He says, “You see, from the olden times, people danced for a number of reasons. They danced in prayer. They danced so their crops would be plentiful. They danced so the hunt would be good.” Ren begins pacing back and forth before the town council. “People dance to stay physically fit. People dance to show community spirit. People danced to celebrate.” He slaps his hands together, “That is the dancing we are talking about. Dancing for the fact that spring is here. Dancing to celebrate because we are graduating. “And aren't we told,” – he waits a beat before dropping his first bomb to the town council – “Aren't we told in Psalm 148 (he snatches up a copy of the bible) “Praise you the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song. Let us praise God's name in the dance.” “And in Ecclesiastes we are told “There is a time to every purpose under heaven, a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.” At that point a member of the town council says “And there was a time for our law against dancing.” Ren turns and meets the challenge head on. He says, “But not anymore. That time is gone. This is our time to dance. This is our way of participating in a rebirth. A new life. That is the way it was in the beginning, the way it has always been, and that's the way it should be now and forever. This is a new time – a new life. It is our time to dance.”

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“ Jesus, come and place your hand on my child so that she will be made well and live.” The words of Jesus say, “I am come that you might have life and have it abundantly.” We today are the People of God. Like Ren MacCormack, we are called to bring new life. Stretch forth your hand. It brings healing and new life. And you don’t have to be ordained to stretch forth your hand. You don’t need a Bishop to put his hands on your head and give you authority to be a follower of Jesus. Don’t ever underestimate encouraging words. Those who are pushed to the fringe of life may not say “Thank you” at the moment, but your words of acceptance and encouragement will bring new life. Giving a new book, writing a thank you note, remembering a name can bring new life. Stretch forth your hand for there are people who need to be healed and called to new life. It is a calling to those of us called Christians.