

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, 6-27-2021

Out of the depths, have I called to you, O Lord, Lord. Hear my voice.

Today, we get the end of several stories. What we're not told is the middle. But the people in each one of these stories spent a long time in the middle calling to God out of the depths.

David had a long wait. We see him here on the cusp of taking power as king of Israel. But he'd been anointed by Samuel almost 15 years before this. Fifteen years of being told by God, *you're the king of Israel*, and waiting 15 years while Saul is still in power. Saul's death, which David laments in our reading for today, opened the door for David to come to his throne. But he'd spent 15 years being pursued by Saul. Having to trust that this promise, this anointing was real. Fifteen years. And even when he came to power, grief marred his ascent. He had to watch the devastation of Israel and the death of a great warrior because Saul was his adversary, but also his father-in-law. Saul was someone with whom he had a relationship, someone who had at one point loved him before he turned against him. So grief and loss are mingled with his moment of triumph. And on top of his grief over the death of Saul, there's his tremendous grief over the loss of his beloved friend, Jonathan, whom he laments as having a love that is dearer to him than the love of women. "Your glory, oh Israel, lies slain upon your high places, how the mighty have fallen." Even in his moment, this cusp of coming to the throne, David is still calling to God out of the depths.

And then there's the story of Jairus' daughter. Imagine what's brought Jairus to this point. He's watched her sickness getting worse and worse. He knew she was in trouble. That's why he went looking for help anywhere that he can find help. He is a desperate father. And you can only imagine the devastating grief when he's told she has died. You notice the announcement in the story is not exactly an announcement filled with compassion. It's like, "Jairus, your daughter's dead, give it up." You know? But Jesus' response is different. It is not, "What are you bugging me for?" Instead, he says, "It is going to be alright. Don't fear. Believe." And against all odds, she's healed.

And then for me one of the most powerful, the most touching character in all of these stories is the woman with the hemorrhage. Again, we hear only the end of her story. But

think about the 12 years of illness that went before it. For a woman in ancient Israel like her to have had a hemorrhage meant that not only was she sick and weak from the hemorrhage, but she was also considered unclean. She could not participate in society. She could not go to worship in the synagogue or the temple. She was excluded and outcast because of this hemorrhage. She would have been considered an invalid, in the sense of that word which means *being in valid* -- having lost her worth, having lost her value and legitimacy in the society for 12 years – and having spent twelve years calling to God out of the depths; trying strategy after strategy after strategy to change her situation, to get better, spending everything she had waiting for God to act, waiting for someone to do something. I wonder how many times she fell asleep at night tempted to give up all hope. And yet she persisted. Then, when she heard about Jesus, she tracked him down. This is one persistent lady. She risked trouble and shame by touching him because she wasn't supposed to be touching anybody. This is the act of a desperate woman, but in that moment of touching Jesus she found healing. Jesus did not settle for merely healing her physical illness. That happened the moment she touched him. Jesus completed the healing because he sought her out and called her daughter. He welcomed her into community and made her fully whole. He greeted her not with shame, but with tenderness and gentleness and love. *Out of the depths have I called to you, oh Lord.*

There are so many situations in our own lives where we wait and plead for God to act. I'm sure that most of you have been through a time like this, some of you may very well be in the middle of a time like this right now -- dealing with illness, dealing with grief and loss. You're waiting. Waiting for hope, waiting for healing. Some have lifelong struggles with depression or mental illness, knowing that this is an illness that will never go away but is, rather, a question of how to live with it. How do you find hope?

Some people are calling to God out of the depths of economic struggles, wondering how they're going to make it, how they're going to continue to put food on the table, how they're going to survive retirement. Some call to God out of the depths of loneliness and isolation. And some are calling to God out of the depths as they struggle for social justice, for civil rights, for full inclusion of all people, because still today we have people who are treated as unclean, as unworthy.

But these stories remind us that faith sometimes looks like persistence. And even looks like troublemaking. Think of Jairus' persistence, hanging in there, trusting Jesus even after he's been told that there's no point in trusting anymore. Think of David's persistence through all those years as he continued to trust that he really would be king someday. And think of the persistence and the audacity of the woman with a hemorrhage interrupting Jesus on a very busy day.

Representative John Lewis, veteran of the civil rights movement, whose skull was fractured by police at Selma, and who died not long ago, once tweeted, *Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year. It is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.*

That good trouble, that necessary trouble, takes a lot of different forms. This week I was reading about the trouble women have getting heard by doctors. Sometimes good trouble, necessary trouble, is not accepting it when a doctor shoves you aside and doesn't listen to you. You persist. You might look for a different doctor, hard as that is to do out here on the coast. You make necessary trouble. And certainly, that's the way the struggle for civil rights, for justice goes. It's about persistence and necessary trouble.

We are called to keep calling out of the depths and to recognize that God is not just with us when healing happens. God is with us in the waiting. We're called to keep praying, to be a community of faith that hears one another's needs and supports each other through those long, difficult waiting times.

We are called to take action as we can. Sometimes we are the one reaching out in the crowd and grabbing Jesus' cloak. And like David, we must be committed to doing God's will and following God's leading, even when it looks like there ain't nothing happening. And through it all, we are called to remember that even if we are not healed (because not everyone is), and even if our loved one is not healed (and many of us have watched loved ones die even untimely deaths), and even if we do not live to see the changes that we are working for come to pass, that does not mean God has abandoned us. God still loves us. God is still at work. And in terms of healing, the truth of our mortal situation is that every one of us will die at some point where a healing beyond death awaits us.

We as Christians believe in the power of the resurrection. We believe that death is not the end for us. Even in the depths, God still loves us, God is still at work. God is still faithful. And even in the depths, God strengthens and encourages us during the wait, and empowers us to act.

We don't know what God has for us. We do know that we're called to hope and trust. What if David had given up? Who could have blamed him if sometime during that 15 years he'd said, *oh, it was probably wrong, Samuel was probably wrong. I'm not supposed to be king. What was I thinking?*

What if Jairus, the synagogue leader, had given up? Who could have blamed him if he'd said, *well, she's dead. What can be done now?*

What if the woman with the hemorrhage had given up? Everyone else had given up on her. But God didn't. God was still present, there for every single one of them. *I wait for the Lord. My soul waits for him. In God's word is my hope. Oh, Israel, wait for the Lord. For with the Lord, there is mercy. With him, there is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all her sins. Amen.*