

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (b)
Lamentations 3:22-33 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 Mark 5:21-43
St. John's Lutheran Church, Grove City OH
June 27, 2021 (Traditional)

Bad things happen in today's gospel lesson because of the timing. This actually ties in with last week's reading. Remember, last week: while the disciples were screaming for their lives, trapped in a boat in the middle of the lake in the howling storm, Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat. So right there, you see that *disconnect* between God's time and our time. From Jesus' point of view, it's a perfect time to take a nap. God's schedule and our schedule are not in line with each other. That's part of living in a world broken by sin and death.

Some of the worst things in life happen because the timing is off. In old war movies, you know, the cavalry dramatically arrives at the last moment to rescue the fort. But if you read war history, you know that half the time in real life, the cavalry gets stuck in the mud. They get there too late. In real life, I think of the lovely person I once knew who had a heart attack and died in a traffic jam on the way to the hospital. In real life, it often happens that the doctor would have detected the disease in time if the patient had scheduled their regular checkup just a few months sooner. The timing in this world totally messed up, so often. In theological terms, it seems like a lot of the time, God and we are not on the same schedule.

And that's what happens in today's gospel. Jesus is on his way to heal a little girl who is near death. Her dad is frantic for Jesus' help. But on the way there, Jesus gets sidetracked. The timing of the story gets messed up. This woman, who had been bleeding for twelve years, puts her hand out and touches Jesus as he passes by in the crowd because she believes that just touching his cloak will heal her. And right there on the spot her bleeding stops.

Now at that point, you'd think that Jesus would keep walking. There's a little girl waiting for him, in desperate need. A whole family is going to be devastated if he doesn't get to her in time. This woman had a bad problem, but now she's OK. Isn't Jesus' work done there? Shouldn't he just keep moving?

Furthermore, the woman clearly doesn't *want* anything more. She *wants* to disappear in the crowd. She didn't think she was important enough to stop Jesus from going on his way. She was just going to sneak in that touch while he was passing by. She would have been happy and grateful and gone on with her life. But that's exactly where Jesus stops in his tracks. He turns around in the crowd and starts looking for the woman. And right there is where he—Jesus—messes up the timing of the whole story.

He insists on stopping and meeting with this woman face to face. All of the sudden, this is his number one priority. *Are we hearing this:* It is more important to Jesus to talk to this woman than to get to that little girl on time! He finds the woman, and suddenly she's in exactly the position she wanted to avoid: she's the center of Jesus' attention.

Everyone in the crowd is suddenly focused on her. She's ashamed, she feels unworthy of it. But Jesus wants the whole story from her. And then with everything out on the table—her life exposed completely to him—Jesus pronounces her healed. Isn't that interesting! She'd already been healed outwardly, from her bleeding. But you see, she's not really healed completely, until she meets with Jesus face to face.

Sometimes we think we're being humble and noble by hiding our problems and pains from the world. Of course we don't want to burden other people, we don't want to be complainers. But we've got to see the danger—the trap—hidden in that kind of humility. It might not be humility after all. It might be us trying to keep a part of our life away from God. It might be us not admitting we need help. It's like we cheer him on once a week, and then we go back to our same small problems. We go back to bleeding our lives away little by little.

But Jesus *will not have that*. The incarnation is God's his way of imposing himself on us. He insists that we take the whole package, the full relationship. He lifted that woman up out of her private world, where she was bleeding life away little by little, into a new, open relationship with him. It was humbling for her, but it was a new life altogether. Jesus doesn't want us to have a kind of partial knowledge of him, on our terms. He wants the complete relationship with us, on his terms. God will stop in his tracks and turn completely around to make that total connection with you and me. You know, people today think they can keep God to themselves. Well, not Jesus. He won't let us keep him to ourselves; and I think when you get down to it, that's really what the woman in the gospel was trying to do. It's like trying to be Christian without the body of Christ. It's a personal Jesus. But he will not have it. He will call us out into the light of day, just like he did the woman. He wants the full, public, open relationship on his terms. In the body.

But wait a second...what about the little girl? She dies. And it could have been avoided. Everyone around the little girl is weeping at the tragedy. But notice how Jesus stays on his course to her. Again, remember last week's lesson, where the disciples are terrified for their lives in the storm, and Jesus is asleep in the back of the boat. He's not concerned with the storm and the threat of death. He's only concerned with *us*. We can trust that. No matter what storm is raging in our lives, our crucified and risen Savior is completely keyed in on us. And just like he calmed the storm last week, in this gospel lesson he reverses the power of death. "Little girl," he says, "get up!" And she does.

Telling the little girl "get up" seems effortless to Jesus. Healing a woman's bleeding takes even less effort—he doesn't even have to say anything. Just a touch does that. But when it comes to having a personal connection with that one individual in the here and now...Jesus will stop everything to make sure that happens. Where are we experiencing that relationship in the body today? Personally I think of the everyday things we do here together at St. John's. Prayer, worship, talking about Jesus, bible reading, learning, simple friendship and fellowship, serving, reaching out, the love and support we give each other...when we give ourselves to these simple things in Jesus' name, we experience the Kingdom of God.

So as I'm bleeding my life away with my troubles and worries and fears and anxieties, as I'm dealing with all the dumb tragedies and accidents and illnesses that happen because of this broken world's bad timing, this gospel is telling me that God has stopped in his tracks—he has turned around from all his original plans—to make a personal and complete connection with me, and with everyone in this room, through this man Jesus...who went into death to reverse it.

And that means that even though we still have our worries and fears, even though our timing is still off way too often, even though we always have to say goodbye to the people we love, Jesus on the cross has made our schedule—no matter how messed up it is—he's made our schedule part of his own life. We can always step back from our personal troubles and know that whether we live or whether we die, our time and God's time have come together perfectly in Jesus right now. All of our illnesses, our worries, our tragedies—all of our deaths—all of our goodbyes—are going to be reversed. Jesus says to the dead little girl, "Get up." And remember, she was dead. She was completely dead. But she got up. With Jesus—with his complete forgiveness and with his promise of the future—that's how you and I can start every day.