

Sermon: Pentecost 6

The Rev. Mike Wernick

July 1, 2018

Year B

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Mark 5:21-43

David's words from 2 Samuel... are words of loss and lamentation... words of despair... perhaps even hopelessness... David has been stripped of friendship... of relationship... and even love... and he prays the mountains of Gilboa remain dry and barren... and admonishes the daughters of Israel to weep...

Yet today's Psalm... is a Psalm of hope... it reminds us that if God paid attention to our sins... none of us... would be able to stand... and affirms that God is a merciful God... and with God there is plenteous redemption... and redemption brings healing...

Almost twenty years ago... I worked for a long-term care... retirement community... like Samaritas is... it was owned by the Church of the Brethren... and not many years before that... Church of the Brethren missionaries in Nigeria... learned about health care in a new way... the missionaries realized that almost half of the children were dying before age five... mostly from preventable diseases... they treated thousands of people... but it soon became apparent that most of the patients returned home only to contract the same illnesses again... so in 1974... a committee made up of both missionaries and Nigerians decided to emphasize community involvement in preventative medicine... the result was the *Lafiya* program...

Lafiya is a word in the Hausa language that means... *well being*... or *wholeness*... it can also mean... *how are you*... it can mean... *I am well*... the exchange of greetings goes on for a long time... with people asking... *is your wife lafiya*... *are your children lafiya*... *your farm*... *your work*... and so on...

And *lafiya* is based in Emmanuel... God with us... the divine spark... the healer within... individuals know their own health needs better than anyone else... and limited only by heredity... or environmental factors beyond our control... we can count on the self-healing power God has woven into our physiology... provided we do what we can to avoid undermining that self-healing...

The woman in today's Gospel had something in common with David... her feelings of loss... her lament... her despair... perhaps even hopelessness... here was a woman... who had been suffering for twelve years... with a bleeding disease... and blood made her unclean... purity laws dictated that she remain isolated... apart... out of and away from community... she endured much under many physicians... who did not have modern medicine at their disposal... spent all she had... was no better... but rather grew worse...

Willie Francois, III... senior pastor at Mount Zion Baptist Church [in Pleasantville, NJ] wrote about how the woman's sickness... taught her body to negotiate the bodies around her... similar to the way enslaved Africans negotiated the presence of white owners... or the way nonwhite youth relate to police... it highlights how purity rules can draw boundary lines... letting some people in and keeping others out... all in the name of the myths we keep about superiority and power... he wrote... *but when she reaches for Jesus... the woman claims her presence and her humanity... she is healed... and she no longer has to seek healing within a health-care system that has taken both her money and her wellness... when she reaches for Jesus' cloak... she reaches across the invisible lines intended to keep her out... lines which aren't aware of her dis-ease...*

And there's an irony in this miracle story... the woman interrupts Jesus... who is already on his way to Jairus' house... Jairus... a leader of the synagogue... we lose sight of him for the moment... but he is one... charged with maintaining the purity laws... which would exclude this woman... he is one... who would keep her away from Jesus... and

keep her unwell... but the creative forces of justice... put her healing on public display... they disrupt the power dynamics... and defy the logic of superiority...

Because of her rebellious reach... the unclean woman claims dignity... wholeness... and a future... all in the presence of a religious elite... and this reach reminds us about all the people... who have... and are... reaching for healing and justice... for all people... against the new purity laws of exclusion...

Rosa Parks had a rebellious and resilient reach... in 1943... James Blake... a white bus driver in Montgomery, Alabama... expelled Parks from a bus after she refused to reenter through the rear doors... rather than comply with segregationist logic... she defiantly waited in the rain for the next bus to arrive... twelve years later... she boarded another public bus... and encountered the same driver... who told her to move to the back of the bus... in what became known as Parks' cardinal act of resistance... she refused... and Blake called the police... she was arrested and the Montgomery Bus Boycott began... 381 days of collective resistance to Jim Crow economics...

But after the Supreme Court ruled against bus segregation and the boycott ended... Blake's bus... intersected Rosa's itinerary for a third time... she boarded an integrated public bus to pose for media coverage of the landmark decision... and in a tone of poetic justice... the same bus driver who left her in the rain in 1943 and had her arrested... had to drive her as she legally sat in the front of the bus... and with the unnamed woman in today's Good News... Rosa Parks' resilience put her progress on display... all in the presence of a custodian of the *status quo*...

We know from the prophet Jeremiah... that God will write God's Law on our hearts... we think about Laws as things like... come to a full stop at the stop sign... but the Laws Jeremiah wrote about... are laws like the Ten Commandments... which instruct us about how we are to be in relationship... about doing unto others as we would have them do unto us... laws that help us embrace our vulnerability and our humanity...

The hemorrhaging woman has poured all she had into getting well... she has sought out learned physicians... and has spent all her money... but is no better... she is no better until she reaches out... in faith... beyond herself... beyond restrictive purity laws... and back into community... she reaches for even the least part of Jesus himself... the dirty hem of his cloak... because even that is powerful...

And Jesus does nothing to heal her... it's her own faith that makes her well... she trusts the voice inside of her that says... *If I but touch his clothes... I will be made well...* and Jesus does not admonish her for touching him... instead... he calls her Daughter... expanding his idea of family even further... and reminding us what he asked in the Gospel on June 10... *Who are my mother and my brothers... whoever does the will of God... that's who...*

In v. 34 of this Gospel... Jesus says... *Daughter... your faith has made you well...* and surprisingly... the word *se-so-keh*... which is translated as *well*... also means... *your faith has made you whole*... or... *your faith has saved you*...

The hemorrhaging woman... is our church... and the church at large... who has poured all she had into getting well... she has hired consultants... and has conducted focus groups... she has spent all her money on advertising and market research... but is no better... not that is... until she reaches out beyond herself in faith... beyond restrictive purity laws... beyond ideas of who's in and who's out... beyond the way we've always done things... not until she reaches past the Laws about powerful authority... to the Laws about vulnerable relationships... and she laments the loss and change we must face... not until wretched excess is replaced by fair balance... so that those who have much do not have too much... and those who have little do not have too little...

And Jairus' daughter is the church... we think she is dead... we're told not to trouble the teacher any further... why bother... there's no hope... and there may be those who try to bury her... but the teacher tells us... *Do not fear... only believe...* because the church

we think is dead... is really only sleeping... and just needs something to eat... some nourishment... to enter back into community... and relationship... we need to replace fear with trust...

Even when there are hereditary or environmental factors beyond our control... we can be made whole... even when we are not cured... we can be healed... even when we face trial... tribulation... challenge... loss... transition... difficulty... pain... despair... rejection... or abandonment... we can place our trust in a faith that transcends dogmas... doctrines... and commandments... because the Wounded Christ is risen... and the Risen Christ is wounded... and God will redeem not only Israel... but the whole world from all our sins... we have the power to replace lamentation with joy... so we can all... be *Lafiya*... it may be God's work... but it's also our hands...

Mike+