

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 28th, 2015

It is striking that we just heard a two thousand-year old story. Two thousand years it's been around and two thousand years it's been told and retold. And here we are today, still hearing and resonating with that old story from the Mid-East. Why? What's its attraction? The answer is, basically, that this story tells us why we are Christians. This story reveals why Jesus captured the people who first heard him, and why he captures us today.

The outline of this familiar story is simple. Jairus, the leader of the synagogue beseeches Jesus to come and heal his daughter. Jesus agrees to come to this important man's house – but on the way, he is interrupted by an unimportant woman who, unlike Jairus, doesn't even have a name. And here's where we begin to get captivated.

He was on an important mission – and here she was irritatingly interrupting, grabbing at the hem of his garment. Can't she see he's preoccupied, has things to do? He doesn't have time

for her. But this unusual man does the unexpected and from his actions, from this story, I learn the five things that tell me why I am a Christian.

First of all, this Jesus not only had time for the unimportant, but a preference for them. Remember, Jesus was with the synagogue leader, a high-powered man – and yet he stops to encounter a marginalized woman. That in itself is remarkable. In that time and place in history, when women had no standing, much less contaminated woman, much less a poor woman – this was revolutionary. As the saying would go in modern times, Jesus showed a preferential option for the poor. And right away, this attitude raised the hope that he will pause for you and I as well.

Second, Jesus has time for losers. He who has the habit of seeing people on the margins senses that here is a woman with losses. Down and out, having given up on her doctors and maybe by her doctors, she is a loser easily relegated to life's sidelines. But not for Jesus. Precisely because she is sidelined, she catches his attention. That raises the hope that he will notice you and I as well; that, in fact, he has.

Third, Jesus has time for affirmation. So far, this woman has been identified only by her bleeding and her pain. But Jesus pauses – he wants to see a face and hear a name. He takes time to see her, not as intrusion or nonentity, but as a human being in need. He calls her “daughter.” And furthermore, he affirms her by giving her credit. “Your faith had made you well.” This raises the hope that he will see you and I not as a face in the crowd, but as who we are, and call us by name. We, like millions of others, find that compelling.

Fourth, Jesus ignores the naysayers. I can hear the complaints of exasperation at his demand to know who touched him. “How can you, ask in this crowd, who touched you?” And when he reaches Jairus’ house, more negative voices. “You’re too late. She’s dead. Why bother?” And when he did bother, they laughed. This raises the hope that the people who put you and I down, who are always negative toward us, who laugh at us, are wrong and that Jesus is right to deal with us and see us alive and not dead as they think.

Fifth, the story, when it’s all said and done, reminds us of a deep truth. Too often we feel that in order to be a good Christian,

we have to try hard and believe this or that, whether we, in fact, actually do believe it or not; that we first have to straighten out our life and get it together, and feel this or that in our hearts in order to be pious and worthy.

But listen again to this story. In the stories of Jairus and the woman, nobody does anything except cry out in the face of death and sickness. No one, as far as I can tell, believes, or feels, or thinks. As a writer, Robert F. Capon put it: “Jesus came to raise the dead. The only qualification for the gift of the gospel is to be dead. You don’t have to be smart. You don’t have to be good. You don’t have to be wise. You don’t have to be wonderful. You don’t have to be anything. You just have to be dead. That’s it.” And this raises the hope that you and I don’t have to be virtuous or “worthy” or even spiritually alive for Jesus to raise us up. In fact, it seems the more “dead” we are, the more he cares.

We learn that even if we’re dead, spiritually or physically, we qualify even more as a candidate for his concern. So we, like so many others throughout the ages, ultimately ask: What kind of person is this? Is it any wonder we would rally around his love and join with others that also do so and call ourselves a church?

You know, it's funny how the mind works. I thought of this gospel one day when I was watching an interview on TV. The person being interviewed was a heroic mother who had singlehandedly raised a large family. In spite of all the frustrations, disappointments, and obstacles, she had persevered, and every one of her children had made remarkable achievements, not only in schooling, but also in their vocation. It was an inspiring story worth celebrating, for it revealed the heights and depths of human greatness. But during the interview, the mother was asked her secret by the reporter who said "I suppose you loved all your children equally, making sure that all got the same treatment."

The mother's answer was stunning and brought me back to this gospel. She replied, "I loved them. I loved them all, each one of them, but not equally. I loved the one the most that was down until he was up. I loved the one the most that was weak until she was strong. I loved the one the most that was hurt until he was healed. I loved the one the most that was lost until she was found."

That's why I'm a Christian.