

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP:

*Let us give thanks to God for his unfailing love,
and his wonderful deeds for humanity!
Let us offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and tell of his works with songs of joy!*
Let us worship God.

(Psalm 107.21-22, adapted)

HYMN: O worship the King!

PRAYER OF APPROACH AND CONFESSION:

Almighty, redeeming, and life-giving God:

You are the wellspring of life, and we marvel at your love and kindness.

We come into your presence to worship you, in gratitude for your grace and generosity toward us — as individuals, as families, and as congregations. We pray that our worship may be pleasing to you, and that it may guide, equip, and motivate us for a new week in your service.

We confess, however, that we have sinned against you and against our fellow human beings, in the ways we think, the things we say, and the things we do. We have been quick to find fault with others, but have been less critical of our own shortcomings. We tend to focus on what we lack, rather than to appreciate what we have. We so easily ignore the needs of others, as we concentrate on our own needs and wants.

Forgive our sin, gracious God; and, through the Holy Spirit, work within us so that we may make progress in becoming the people you want us to be, rather than continuing to make the same mistakes time after time.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior; and we pray together, now, as he taught us:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

(Matthew 6.9-13, KJV)

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Hear this good news from the scriptures:

*God has shown his love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us;
we have been justified by his blood.*

(Romans 5.8-9)

So, if we have confessed our sin to God sincerely,
let us be assured that God will forgive us.

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

- **Old Testament Reading:** 2 Samuel 1.1, 17-27 - David's lament for Saul and Jonathan
In this reading, David laments the deaths of King Saul and his son Jonathan. In the final chapter of *First Samuel*, Jonathan was killed in battle by the Philistines; and Saul, injured in the same battle, opted to die by suicide, rather than be killed by the enemy.
In the reading, "Gath" and "Ashkelon" are the names of Philistine cities, and "Gilboa" is the name of the mountain on which Saul died.
- **Psalm:** Psalm 130 - "Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD".
Psalm 130 is a penitential psalm.
It's a prayer for help; and in it, the writer speaks of God's mercy, which gives him confidence that God will help him in his situation, in spite of his sinfulness.
In the final two verses, the writer urges all of Israel also to trust in God's mercy.
- **Letter Reading:** 2 Corinthians 8.1-15 - Paul's financial appeal
In this reading, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to donate money to support their fellow Christians in Jerusalem, who are living in poverty.
- **Gospel Reading:** Mark 5.21-43 - Jairus' daughter; a woman with bleeding
This reading consists of two stories. A man asks Jesus to heal his daughter, who is seriously ill; and, while he is heading to the man's home, he is approached by a woman who suffers from incurable bleeding.

SERMON:

In last Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee, from Jewish territory on the west side to Gentile territory on the east. That's the story in which a storm suddenly comes up, a storm that Jesus then calms with just a couple of words.

The lectionary has us skip over the story that comes next — a story in which, on the far side of the lake, Jesus drives a "legion" of demons out of a man, demons that then possess a nearby herd of pigs. And then we come to the reading for today, which begins with Jesus and his disciples crossing the lake again, back to Jewish territory on the west side.

Today's reading consists of *two* stories. Once again, Mark begins with the first story, interrupts it to tell the second story, and then goes back to finish Story Number One. We saw this pattern also in the passage we read three weeks ago — the one in which Jesus' family members go looking for him in order take him home, in which Jesus then is criticized by teachers of the law from Jerusalem, and in which Jesus' mother and brothers finally track him down.

In today's reading, Story Number One has to do with a man named Jairus, who approaches Jesus, asking him to heal his daughter, who is seriously ill. Story Number Two is about an unnamed woman who has incurable bleeding, and seeks to be healed by Jesus, although without

actually *asking* him to heal her.

These two stories are found in the other two Synoptic Gospels, too — Matthew and Luke. Interestingly, though, Mark’s account is longer and more detailed than the other two. For example, the detail that the woman with the bleeding had spent all her money on various doctors and treatments, and that, in spite of that, her condition only got worse, is found only here in Mark. Similarly, only Mark quotes the Aramaic words that Jesus spoke to Jairus’ daughter: *Talitha, koum* (Mark 5.41). Aramaic was the language that Jews in First-Century Israel spoke — a language similar to Hebrew.

The story begins simply enough: a man named Jairus approaches Jesus, and asks him to heal his daughter, who is close to death. The fact that the man is named, and that he is a “synagogue leader”, indicates that he has some standing in the community. Nevertheless, he [*falls*] *at Jesus’ feet*, as Mark puts it (Mark 5.22), indicating both his desperation and the urgency of the situation. So Jesus heads off to Jairus’ home, followed by a large crowd. And this is where Mark *pauses* Story Number One, while he tells Story Number Two.

In the crowd is a woman who has suffered from bleeding for twelve years. Commentators surmise that her condition was specifically *vaginal* bleeding, which, in addition to other difficulties, would mean that she was considered perpetually “unclean”, according to Old Testament law. She was essentially in the same boat as a person with leprosy. That is, as an “unclean” person, she would have to *avoid* contact with other people, because if they touched her, or she touched them, they too would become ritually “unclean”.

Nevertheless, having heard about Jesus, and believing that just touching his clothes would cause her to be healed, she manages to push her way through the crowd, and to approach Jesus from behind. For some reason, she doesn’t want to *ask* Jesus to heal her; rather she prefers to stay anonymous, and not to attract attention to herself. Perhaps it’s her status as an “unclean” person that prompts her to act this way. Strictly speaking, of course, she shouldn’t even *be* in the crowd.

Any hope the woman had that she could be healed discreetly and without attracting any attention is quickly dashed, however. She turns out to be right in her belief that just touching Jesus’ clothes would heal her ailment; but Jesus realizes what has happened, and asks who it was who just touched him. I suppose the woman could’ve slunk off; but, although frightened, she admits what she has done. Jesus doesn’t rebuke her, though. Rather, he says to her, kindly, *Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace, and be freed from your suffering* (Mark 5.34). Rather than scolding the woman for touching his clothes, then, Jesus affirms her faith, and confirms that she has been healed. What a blessing it must’ve been to hear Jesus say that! She would *never* have heard those words if she had stayed silent, and had simply disappeared into the crowd.

Interestingly, what Jesus says in Mark’s original Greek is not just “your faith has *healed* you”, but “your faith has *saved* you”. Not only has her physical health been restored; so has her place in the community, since she is now no longer to be considered “unclean”. She can once

again have normal interactions with people. She can get together with family members and friends. She can go shopping. She can attend synagogue services. No longer is she someone who has to keep away from everyone else. She really *has* been “saved”.

At this point, then, Mark returns to Story Number One. Family members or friends of Jairus arrive, with the news that his daughter has just died. There’s nothing more that can be done for her, they say; Jairus needn’t bother Jesus any longer. We can just imagine Jairus’ shock, dismay, and sorrow at this news. His hopes for her healing have been dashed. It’s a parent’s worst nightmare.

Jesus, however, is undeterred. He says to Jairus, *Don’t be afraid; just believe* (Mark 5.36), and the two of them continue making their way to Jairus’ home, accompanied by only Peter, James, and John, the inner circle of Jesus’ group of twelve disciples.

Family members, relatives, and friends have already gathered at Jairus’ home, and have begun the custom of loud crying and wailing. When Jesus, Jairus, and the three disciples arrive, Jesus shushes them all, saying, *Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead, but asleep* (Mark 5.39). Of course, Jesus *knows* the girl is dead, but his words hint at what he is about to do. We’re reminded of the story in the Gospel of John, in which Jesus’ friend Lazarus dies. In that story, Jesus says to his disciples, *Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up* (John 11.11) — in other words, to bring him back to life — which, of course, is what he does.

That’s what Jesus does here, too. Accompanied by only Jairus, Mrs. Jairus, and the three disciples, he goes to the girl’s room, takes her hand, and says those Aramaic words, *Talitha, kum* — which of course, mean “Little girl, get up” (Mark 5.41), and the girl gets up — just as if she *had* been sleeping! Can we imagine how her parents must have felt? And the girl herself — did she have any idea of what had just happened to her? In any case, Jesus, very considerately, advises Jairus and his wife to give her something to eat.

As for Jesus’ giving them strict orders not to let anyone know what has happened (Mark 5.43), it’s hard to imagine how Jairus and his wife could’ve kept this miracle under wraps. However, this is what Jesus often says in Mark after having done some miraculous deed — as if to keep people from guessing his true identity, perhaps.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ miracles are called “signs”; that is, signs of Jesus’ true identity as the Son of God — or as we would say today, “God the Son”. In Mark, however, as in Matthew and Luke, Jesus’ miracles are seen more as signs of God’s compassion for human beings; signs of the kingdom of God breaking into everyday life in order to set right things that have gone wrong, giving people a preview of what the life of the age to come will be like, when everything has been brought under God’s control. So what we have in today’s reading are a story in which Jesus, through his power as God the Son, sets things right for a woman who has had an ailment for twelve years that has had not only debilitating physical consequences, but also isolating social consequences; and a story in which Jesus brings a girl who has died back to life, to

the extreme relief and joy of her parents.

So what is God's message for *us* in today's reading? Both of today's stories mention *faith*: in Story 2, Jesus commends the anonymous woman for her faith, and in Story 1, Jesus tells Jairus not to be afraid, but to "believe". Does this mean that, if we have faith, we too can expect miraculous healings; and that if we don't experience miraculous healings, it means that our faith is inadequate? Personally, I don't think it's as simple as that. I'm sure we all know of situations in which people of faith have not experienced healing, and have either died or lived the rest of their lives with some kind of chronic illness or disability. Conversely, I'm sure that there are people of *no* faith who *have* experienced healing, miraculous or otherwise.

When I look at these two stories, what stands out for me is Jesus' compassion, his willingness to use his power to help people in distress, and his willingness to be interrupted. Jesus agrees to go to Jairus' home right away, even though he may have had other plans; and similarly, he takes time with the woman who has "sneaked" a healing from him, as it were, before resuming the walk to Jairus' home.

Compassion, willingness to help people in distress, and willingness to be interrupted or inconvenienced — these themes are present also in today's reading from the Letters. In it, Paul seeks to convince his readers in Corinth to contribute money for members of the church in Jerusalem, who are experiencing poverty. Paul has mentioned this financial appeal in *First Corinthians*, as well, and it is evident from today's reading that the appeal was first launched some time before. In today's reading, he speaks of "last year" (2 Corinthians 8.10), so the appeal is obviously not a new undertaking.

As to why Christians in Jerusalem were in financial difficulty, Paul doesn't explain. Presumably, the Corinthians already knew this. The Book of Acts mentions a famine, which would've caused people to lose their assets. Also, Christians in Jerusalem were experiencing persecution, which may very well have had negative financial consequences as well.

Regardless of the reasons for the financial crisis, Paul was eager to have Gentile churches that he had helped to establish come to the aid of the mother church in Jerusalem — as an expression of compassion and solidarity. In today's reading, Paul speaks of the exemplary generosity of the congregations in Macedonia in supporting this appeal. Macedonia was a region in northern Greece, while Corinth was a city in southern Greece.

As Paul saw it, the Christian faith brought both Jews and Gentiles together into a single community; and the fact that congregations in faraway Greece would contribute funds to assist fellow Christians in need in Jerusalem was a tangible way of expressing that unity and solidarity. So, in this reading, Paul reminds his readers of their original enthusiasm for the appeal, and urges them to see it through to completion.

Contributing money to assist people in need — especially strangers — isn't nearly as spectacular as the miraculous healings that Jesus did during his ministry; but for ordinary human be-

ings, like the Corinthians and like us, it is certainly doable. The key motivating factor, I believe, is compassion — a recognition of the difficulty or distress in which others find themselves, and a desire to use our own resources in order to be of assistance.

A modern-day example came to mind as I read the “Mission Moment” in today’s Announcements Sheet. A nurse in Malawi, in southern Africa, in response to a shortage of doctors in her hospital, seeks to become a doctor herself. She now receives financial assistance from our national church here in Canada, and also from a congregation in southern Ontario, which helps to pay for her education and training. It’s not miraculous healing, by a long shot, but it is a step toward improving the health care available at that nurse’s hospital. The financial assistance is motivated by compassion, not only for the aspiring doctor herself, but also for her future patients.

As ordinary human beings, our power to help people in distress is much more limited than the power that Jesus wielded; but we shouldn’t underestimate what generosity toward people in need can accomplish — generosity motivated by compassion, that is: the same compassion that Jesus felt for those whom he healed of various ailments and disabilities, and for the twelve-year-old girl he brought back to life.

As people of God in our own time, may we be seen to be compassionate people, who are willing to give assistance to people in need or distress, and willing to be interrupted or inconvenienced as various situations come to our attention.

HYMN: The great Physician now is near

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE *[see separate document]*

OFFERING

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:

Compassionate God:

We are grateful that you keep reaching out to us and to the entire world, to offer strength, guidance, healing, and encouragement in the midst of our troubles and difficulties.

In gratitude, we commit ourselves anew to being channels of your blessing to the people around us, as individuals and as part of your church. We present to you our offerings, then, to support the work that your church does for you in the world; and we pray that that work may help to make a positive difference in people’s lives, nearby and far away.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

HYMN: How sweet the name of Jesus sounds ...

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING:

Brothers and sisters in Christ:
Go into the week ahead, now,
in peace,
and in the strength of the Holy Spirit,
to return to your daily service for God,
seeking always to be compassionate and generous.
And may God bless you:
May he continue to guide you in his ways,
and to strengthen you for each day's challenges;
in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.