

Two Daughtersⁱ**Sermon June 27, 2021**

Lamentations 3:21-33, Mark 5:21-43

Pastor Barbara Johnson, www.ulch.org**Grace and peace to you from God - who is the source of all life,
and from Jesus the Christ, Redeemer of all the world. Amen**

The scriptures we have before us today
paint a picture of who God IS and who God is NOT...

In Lamentations, we hear this description of a loving God
who is merciful, forgiving and faithful.

It is a WITNESS to those who wait a long time in suffering.

They pray for healing ... and they wait,

They pray for deliverance... and they wait.

It seems to some that God is not only ignoring them,
but maybe even angry or punishing them.

But the lesson here is about leaning on our faith in the midst of waiting

Trusting that GOD is HERE - with us in our suffering

EVEN when we cannot see... Even when it is most difficult to wait.

If you have ever prayed for anything, you know something about waiting...

For some of us, the wait is LONG and arduous...

When we wait for some sign of God's answer to our own particular prayers

the teaching throughout the scriptures is this:

Look to God... Trust in God's love and mercy...

Experience our own time of prayer and waiting as a learning time... a growing
time...as a healing time...

God's time is not something we can understand in the moment...

but the PROMISE OF GOD TO US is this:

“God does not willingly torment or punish any human being.”

This morning we hear two stories of healing - BOTH involve a LONG wait...

A 12 yr old child is near death, while her father Jairus - the leader of the synagogue - breaks through the crowd and begs Jesus to come QUICKLY to his home, and save his daughter ...

and he waits, desperately,

but by now, Jesus’ travel is SLOWED to a snail’s pace,

there are CROWDS of people around him - hoping to get a glimpse of him

And there is a woman in the crowd ...

For 12 years, she has had continuous bleeding,

so she is considered unclean - impure - and seemingly “infectious”

because if she touches ANYONE, then they too will be unclean...

so she has been relegated to a life of isolation...

Twelve years without touch.

Twelve years without the prayers of the synagogue

Twelve years filled with loneliness, fear and pain.

She didn’t ask. The woman was desperate... and she had nothing to lose.

She could have been stoned to death for getting too close to anyone.

Yet, she mustered up the courage to reach out and touch Jesus’ garment.

Two females. Two “daughters”

Two very different lives, both desperate.

Both of them need a miracle.

We’ve all known someone who could use a miracle.

Most all of us have prayed for a miracle at sometime in our lives.

Maybe you've followed the news this week - after the building collapse in Miami - while people slept in their beds... we can only imagine the horror. Certainly, the families and friends of those still missing continue to pray... desperate for good news... fearing the worst...

I am confident there are people all over the world who are sending up prayers for those who died... those injured... those who have not yet been found... WE TOO will pray for them this morning...

Clearly, not every person who prays for a miracle gets one.

The apparent randomness can leave us wondering...

Is there a RIGHT way to pray - a more POWERFUL way to get God's attention?

Am I not faithful enough? Am I not important enough?

Maybe if we get enough people to pray for the same thing...that might work...

The gospel stories of the two - a little girl on her deathbed, and a woman who has suffered for as long as that girl has been alive...

The only thing they have in common is their need for a miracle
their need for new life

their stories are woven together - paired unlikely - with Jesus between them.

Now... depending on who WE are - and where WE sit as we listen to this -

If just ONE of them gets the miraculous healing...

If you had to guess - if you had to vote - on who was more deserving...

Who had the most to lose - who was most likely to succeed in their future

Who would YOU pick..? Hmmm?

The Jesus we know from the gospels... has the power to ignore the crowd and rush to Jairus' house - But the Jesus we know from the gospels is always more concerned with those on the edges of society.

And what about all those other people along the way
the CROWD of people that Jesus did not reach out and touch with healing?

What about all the people who pray for peace and safety in the midst of war,
All the people who pray for healing and whose prayers do not seem to be
answered?

Is it because they don't believe strongly enough?

Or they don't have enough people praying on their behalf?

It's easy to get into misguided thinking
when we believe miracles are something we can control.
If you are sick and getting sicker, it must be your own fault.
Try harder, be more positive, reach further,
show God the power of your belief and claim your miracle as a reward.

This is one of our efforts to work things around in our own minds,
so that WE can seem to be in control of our lives,
instead of owning up to the truth that
every single breath we take - is a gift from God.

One of the most important parts of the Gospel story,
are the words Jesus spoke to Jairus early on, when he told him,
"Do not fear, only believe."

If Jairus were able to do that, then he would survive whatever happens next,
even if Jesus would have walked into his daughter's room
and declared her already dead.

Jairus's faith would have then become the miracle...
 the miracle would have been his willingness to believe
 that his daughter was still in God's good hands
 even though she had slipped out of his.

Another important detail in this story is what Jesus tells the outcast woman to do - after she has been healed. He doesn't leave her behind.
 He brings her forward and insists that she tell her story - speaks her truth - so that all can hear and see that she is healed and whole...
 that she should no longer be invisible - or cast aside.

Maybe this is the greatest miracle of all:
 the possibility that the WITNESSES to the two daughters who have been healed,
 could have been transformed themselves,
 by witnessing the healing power of compassion.
 One can only hope - that WE can be transformed in our own faithfulness
 By a God who is faithful to us - every one of us - beyond measure.

Jesus himself prayed for a miracle on the night before his death.
 He knew that with God all things were possible...
 he asked for God to remove the bitter cup from him.
 And when he opened his eyes -- the cup was still there....

Was Jesus lacking in faith?

The miracle was that he drank the cup, Believing in the power of God...

Maybe Jesus' miracles were not so much about power exhibited,
 but rather power exhausted...
 power drains from Jesus because his ministry was not ALL ABOUT HIM
 By that I mean, it was not about feeding his own ego...

BUT it was the self-emptying of this son of God...
for the benefit of others... on behalf of the world...
and therefore... we have the cross.

We might pray boldly for miracles...

But maybe the greatest miracle is that

prayer connects us in love with God -- and with the rest of humanity...

Prayer helps us to put our needs and wants - into perspective

Prayer helps us to wait... to find hope in God's promise -

to never leave us orphaned / never leave us alone in our distress

To care about what happens to others,

to work for healing and change in a world where there is so much need ...

even when we can't see the results we would like to see.

SO, WHAT IS GOD UP TO in these stories today?

What is truly amazing is that God wants to work miracles of love and healing -
not just FOR US -- but IN US and THROUGH US... for the world...

So with Jesus' words of encouragement

We do not fear...we only believe.

And if we can do just that...

and keep on going, in whatever way we feel the spirit leading us,
well, then,

It would be a miracle... don't you think?

Amen

ⁱ Ideas inspired and quoted liberally from Debi Thomas – Journey with Jesus 7.27.21