



Keep On Keeping On

TEXT
Mark 5:21–43

June 17, 2018 — Sermon by Rev. Len Carrell

It's Father's Day. So, Happy Father's Day!

In today's text, we meet Jairus, a wealthy leader of the synagogue. But he is also a father — a father whose daughter is at the point of death. He comes to Jesus. He seeks out our Lord, falls to his knees and begs him to help his little girl.

I'll never forget a few years ago when my mother was having a pretty serious surgery. I went to the hospital to be by her side, and my dad was sitting over in the corner of the room noticeably concerned, when their pastor walked in the door. I'll never forget what my mom said to her. She said, "Oh God, thanks be to Jesus you're here! Will you *please* pray for him; he's driving me crazy."

Well, of course, we dads get weak in the knees when anything happens to our family — our spouses, our children, our parents. They're our whole life. And I have had the hard, but blessed task of walking with parents who have lost a child, and I can't imagine anything worse.

Jairus' love for his daughter has made him desperate.

My father often talked about a time when he felt desperate. My oldest brother, James, was

in a terrible motorcycle accident when he was in college at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, which was 3½ hours away from us.

I was teenager at the time, but I remember my dad telling that story over and over again: Of how he made that trip in 2 hours flat. How he prayed to God that he would make it to his son soon. How he prayed to God he wouldn't get a speeding ticket. How he talked to God the whole way there. How, when he got to the hospital, the nurses weren't going to let him in the ER, but how he was insistent that he was going to see his son.

When a child is in danger, we get desperate, and it can bring us to our knees.

And that is exactly where we find this father, Jairus, in our text today. Jairus, a father whose little girl is at the point of death, is at the point of losing all control. With nowhere else to turn, he turns to Jesus. He throws himself at feet of a stranger, who has even stranger power, and begs him for help. The only faith that Jairus is depending on in this moment is the faith of what others have told him about this man — that if this man Jesus can help, will he help?

And Mark tells us that, without hesitation, Jesus goes with

him. But they don't get very far, do they?

There is another story that collides with this one — another story of desperation; a story of an unnamed woman who also seeks out the Lord for help. The reason we meet her in this story is because she is also at a point of death, a living death — because living for 12 years with this uncontrollable condition has labeled her impure in the eyes of her community, no doubt by a local leadership of men. She is also in a desperate place.

What we do know about her is that she has some kind of medical condition that no amount of money or doctors is able to help. She also has nowhere to turn, so she turns to Jesus — a strange man, with even stranger power, whom she has only heard stories about from others. But this woman's faith takes her all the way to him; all the way to reaching out and touching the hem of his garment.

I wonder if Jairus knew this woman — at least the part of her story that made sense to him: that she was unclean and unable to participate at his church, and that he himself could not help her. I wonder how he would've seen Jesus' actions toward her. How would he have heard Je-

sus' words when Jesus call her "daughter"?"

Both of them seek out the Lord in their deepest need, and both of them are equally important to Jesus — so important that he names the woman his "daughter." And this daughter of our Lord teaches this father an important lesson: that in the eyes of God, we are all God's children. And she also teaches him an important faith lesson — a lesson that says, faith doesn't follow us, we follow it.

At the beginning of the story, Jesus is following Jairus to his house. But then he stops. He stops and says, "Who touched me?" Jesus knows that power has left him, and he wants to know who it is. When he sees the woman face-to-face, he says, "Your faith has made you well." *Her faith has made her well.* He points not only to her, but to her faith.

At this point, Jairus' friends are running up to him saying, "Don't bother. It's too late."

"Don't trouble the teacher any longer ... just give up, and come bury your daughter."

And Jesus has only one message for him: "Stop being afraid, and just keep on believing."

He says, "Keep on believing!" He says, "Believe in the faith this woman has shown in me — the faith that she is showing to you — that you can have too. Keep believing in that kind of faith. No matter how much the world says, 'Don't bother! It's too late,' just keep on keeping on. And don't be afraid — because not only does it have the power to get your daughter through this,

it also has the power to get you through this."

When we reach out for help, which is a hard decision to make, we have to be vulnerable enough to trust that help. We have to trust that the healing touch of Christ will find us and lead us through it. And following Jesus all the way through the pains of life, all the way through the shadows of doubt, that in following our faith wherever Jesus takes us, healing will be found — or rather, it will find us. And I trust it will lead us to a more hopeful place.

Anne Lamott says, "I do not understand the mystery of grace. Only that it meets us where we are, but does not leave us where it found us."

So we have to stop being afraid and keep on keeping on. We need to keep on believing in the faith that has brought us this far, and keep reaching out to others who help us to keep the faith. We have to stay true to ourselves; stay true to each other; stay true to our calling; stay true to our Lord. And that's not a lesson just for today, but that's a lesson for every day.

Jesus names this unnamed woman "daughter," to remind us that we are all God's children. And he points to her faith to tell us we're going to need faithful people like her to teach us to reach out for help, for there is healing when we reach out, when we keep on keeping on.

As a pastor whose primary calling here at Village is to care for people, I know how hard it is to ask for help — because I know if I needed help, I would be the stubbornest person on earth. (So

stubborn that when I was writing this sermon and Spellcheck told me *stubbornest* wasn't a word, I used it anyway.)

Asking for help can be hard. Accepting help can be even harder. But what I've learned along the way is that when we do ask for help, when we do accept it, there is some kind of holy healing in it. Every day can be hard. And today it's hard not to see how much healing our world needs right now. But I also believe that in these days, there are healing times.

And I want to tell you about a moment that was one of great healing. You may have seen it, but if you didn't, I don't want you to miss it.

Each year at the Tony Awards, which was last Sunday, the Broadway community recognizes and honors a theatre teacher with an Excellence in Theatre Education Award. This year it went to the theatre teacher of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Her name is Melody Herzfeld. And all of us remember what happened on that horrific Valentine's Day, when a former student returned to school and shot 17 of his peers.

Ms. Herzfeld was a woman of valor on that day, when she saved 65 of her students' lives, and her own, by sheltering them in her office for hours.

On Sunday when she received her award, Ms. Herzfeld shared some of her memories about that terrifying day. She said, "I remember on February 7 sharing a circle with my beloved students and encouraging them to

be good to each other when times were trying and to keep the family together. Accept everyone, and make a difference. And I remember only a week later on February 14, a perfect day,” she said “where all these lessons in my life and in their short lives would be called upon to set into action, letting the stronger be our collective voice and supporting the rest that needed time.”

When news was announced that Ms. Herzfeld would be receiving the award two weeks prior to the show, news she had to keep to herself for over a month, Ms. Herzfeld reflected: “It was like Christmas in our room ... and finally seeing these kids with some real, true joy on their faces ... it was as though they all had been given this amazing honor, too.”

These kids just keep on keeping on in their faith journey in what will probably be remembered as the most terrifying and desperate day of their lives. And last Sunday, we all got to see a little bit of healing hope happen for Ms. Herzfeld’s students. And if you missed it, you have to see it — because we could see on their faces the minute the curtain rose, and we heard these few chords of music. [Play the short clip of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas HS theatre students singing “Seasons of Love” from *Rent*.]

I love watching how the audience was grooving to the message they are sending in this moment — or that woman who was holding her chest, holding her heart, so that she

can remember that feeling always. This is a moment of healing for these kids, a season of healing love — and all because they were taught not to only use their gifts and their voices for playing on a stage, but to use them to make a difference in the world.

In a later interview, Ms. Herzfeld said, “Every piece of beautiful theater is truth, and I think that when a child or a student that is 14- to 18-years-old is given permission to tell their truth, they’ll sing it from the top of the car, and they’ll sing it from the top of the roof.” And Ms. Herzfeld, I would add that your students on that stage were singing it from mountaintops.

We are all going to find ourselves in desperate times and desperate places — just like Jairus and just like this woman named “God’s daughter.” And in those desperate times and desperate places, faith really does matter.

There is nothing more unimaginable than the death of a child, or any child at the point of death; any child at risk of being in danger; any child in fear of being ripped away from their family; any child who is reaching out for our help and our love. And sometimes we hear it. And sometimes we miss it. And that is just the harsh reality of it.

And that kind of desperation will reach us all — fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers — it will reach all of us. We will find ourselves with nowhere else to turn but to turn to Jesus, because faith in him makes a difference.

And in those times, we have to choose to not be afraid to keep on keeping on. We have to trust in the faith that has brought us this far — because faith doesn’t follow us, we follow him. We follow Jesus, who shows us that faith matters — because the mystery of God’s love is that Jesus is going to meet us in those desperate places, but never leave us there.

And step by step, as we seek out our Lord, the one who lifts us from the darkness of despair and into hope, the one who shows us how to keep on keeping on, there will be healing in our journey together — healing that finds us and claims us and calls us daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, members of a God’s heavenly kingdom.

And so, my friends, keep on keeping on. When the world says, “Don’t bother,” let us pray to keep on keeping on.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.