

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
July 1, 2018

In today's gospel reading, Jesus met three people – Jairus, an unnamed woman, and a young girl. The theologian David Lose notes that each one is utterly different but so very similar. Jairus was a local Synagogue leader who, by his position, status, and gender, had power, prestige, and comfort. At the opposite end of the socio-economic spectrum was an unnamed woman living with a chronic illness. Not only was she labeled “unclean,” which robbed her from both physical touch and entrance to the temple, but in her pain, she was a victim of predatory physicians taking money and giving nothing. Then, there was Jairus's daughter who was barely alive with no power, no rights, and no say in what would happen to her.

Three people. Three different stations in life. Yet, one similar situation. In Jairus's helplessness, he was reduced from a privileged stance to a beggar's posture. The woman who could not be touched, wanted nothing more than to feel Jesus's clothes. And the doomed little girl, she surrendered her body to hollow thoughts and prayers.¹

But, vulnerability was not the only thing shared, they also shared an encounter – an encounter with a God who *always* responds with compassion. And, because Jesus is so stereotypically Jesus in this story, we probably don't recognize the magnitude of his response. After all, we assume Jesus will engage everyone. We expect Jesus to bring healing and wholeness. We presume Jesus will be compassionate. Yet, Jesus's actions then and now boldly defy the world's status quo.

¹ See <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/06/pentecost-6-b-on-vulnerability-need-and-hope/> and <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2012/06/begging-believers-and-scorning-skeptics.html>

After all, as a people, compassion is not always our first response. We'd rather call someone a "deplorable," we'd rather chant "lock her up," and we'd rather passively support children being torn from their parents. Time and again, our response is so far from Christ's compassion that we have forgotten the essence of our faith.

That's why today's story is so jarring. It was not an earth-shaking, mountain-moving gesture that these three needed for healing. A simple, kind, and gentle touch was all that was required. You see, Jesus's compassionate response was neither theoretical nor distant, rather Jesus met them, touched them, and joined himself to them.

So too, we have been encountered by Christ in our baptisms. As we baptized John moments ago, we engaged in the practice of laying on of the hands. This action reminds us of God's embodied presence. It reminds us that our God is not found in abstract principles or seen "once upon a time in a far-off place," rather God's presence is found here and now through you and me. God's presence is found as we gather around the font of compassion reminding us that every single person deserves love, acceptance, and understanding.

Shortly before John's baptism, we renounced the powers of this world, the structures of inequality and the agents of oppression that undermined God's purposes along with our participation with these powers. With that profession, we discover that God is present when we contact our elected officials to name that family separation is unjust and evil. For, today's gospel reminds us that as migrants flee from violence and torture, giving up everything they've known to come and take the vulnerable position of a beggar, we are called to respond with Christ-like compassion. When migrants want to bask in the glow of the prosperity of our flowing robes, we are called to reject dehumanizing labels and instead call them "beloved children." As children are torn away from their families, struggling to survive with empty "thoughts and prayers," then we

must take these children by the hand, restore them to wholeness with their families, and say “give them something to eat.”²

As I say these words, I can hear my inbox filling with complaints about my preaching becoming too political. So I want to be clear. You can advocate for distinct borders with extensive vetting. You can argue that we need to instill fear in people’s minds to deter them from crossing the border. You have every right to contact your representatives with those beliefs. The thing is, that is not Christ’s message – that is an entirely different message. That is a message that undermines God’s purposes and has been used time and again in this country. We’ve seen children torn from their enslaved parents’ arms. We’ve seen indigenous children forcibly separated from their families. In both cases, we now look back and think “how could people stand by and watch that happen,” and at the same time, we turn on the television and ignore today’s injustices. And, I can say that with complete conviction because we’ve seen God’s message in these past two chapters of Mark. We’ve discovered that no stage of life, no geographic barrier, and no national border can or will hold back Jesus’s compassion. We witness it throughout Jesus’s ministry as he reaches out to the helpless, hopeless, fearful, and imprisoned. At the end of the day, as your pastor I must remind you of what Christ says and does, and, frankly, I could care less about which political party or ideology “wins” at the end of the day. Because over the past two millennia, political parties have come and gone, but God’s message of compassion to all people remains as the gift of eternal life.

That, my friends, is today’s good news. We have a God whose compassion knows no boundaries. We have a benevolent and loving God – who cares for you and for all people. And as Christ-followers, we are called to reflect that kindness. For in that pursuit, our God promises us healing, wholeness, and eternal life. Amen.

² Consider a similar story: https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3718