
#Bleeding Lives Matter

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1, 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Mark 5:21-43

A sermon preached in Duke University Chapel on September 18, 2016 by the Rev. Alan Storey

N.B. This text has been directly transcribed from the preached sermon.

“Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my people not been restored? The agonizing questions of Jeremiah are the questions of so many people today. For so many people, in so many places here and around the world, the cry is, “My Joy is gone, grief is upon me. My heart is sick. I am hurt. I mourn and dismay has taken hold of me. O that my head be a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears so that I might weep day and night.”

What the world needs perhaps more than anything else at this time is people full of courageous compassion. One without the other will not cut it. Courage without compassion will merely add to the hurt. Compassion without courage will not reach the full depths of the hurt. What the world needs perhaps more than anything else are people full of courageous compassion.

Jesus was a person full of courageous compassion.

In the gospel reading which we heard this morning, we find Jesus on a beach surrounded by a crowd. The narrator tells us Jesus has just returned from a journey to the other side, the place of other-ness, the place of difference, the place that was only ever spoken of in suspicious and fearful tones. It was a place declared off limits by the cultural police and religious watch dogs of the day. It was strictly taught and firmly believed that the others of the other side were impure and defiled and therefore a great disappointment to God. They were known to be deserving recipients of God’s wrath. It was a criminal act to go to the other side in the way that Jesus went to the other side. Jesus went in compassion. There was a sick irony. You could go to the other side to hurt, that was legal. You could go to the other side to attack, that was allowed. You could go to the other side to bomb, that was deemed heroic, but Woe to you if you go to the other side to heal, to embrace, to delight in the difference, Woe to you.

Jesus goes to the other side with compassion. It takes great courage to go to the other side with compassion, to delight in those who the dominant order believed were defiled. Jesus doesn’t just go to the other side with compassion, he goes in God’s name and he embraces those whom others believe God rejected. In so doing, he was accused of his second crime and that was blasphemy. For Jesus, the real crime was that an other side existed at all. Jesus goes to the other side as if the other side is not an other side. He doesn’t practice any of the purity codes that were required of you if you go to the other side [and return] because He doesn’t want to validate the theology of other-ing. His third crime is that he is now unclean. He has brought the other side back. He is incarnating the other side, this side.

Then we read that one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and when he saw Jesus, fell at Jesus’ feet, begging him repeatedly for help for his little daughter was at the point of death. “Come, please and lay hands upon her so that she might be made well and live.” Can you hear how dismay has taken hold of his heart? He knows what it means to have a head full of a fountain of tears.

If there was anyone who would have known the laws of other-ing it was Jairus. In fact, it was Jairus’ job to implement the laws of other-ing. He was a policy maker of prejudice. So, here we witness a defender of the law break the law to

approach Jesus. It takes great courage. It was not just a criminal act for Jairus, but it would have been deemed as a deep act of betrayal. It was for him to say good-bye to the life that he had always known. From the perspective of his family and colleagues, they would have seen Jairus in this moment to forsake his faith, betray his beliefs, dishonor and break the book of order in asking Jesus to lay his defiled hands on his daughter. Jairus is moved by compassion for his daughter. He is filled with courage and would rather lose his name to defilement, then his daughter to death.

It seems his daughter's illness has awoken Jairus to the lie that he has always believed, that he is better than others. He has believed that his faithfulness to the law, won him God's special favor. This law that was meant to protect him and keep he and his family safe is not protecting his daughter and so Jairus comes to Jesus. He courageously comes to Jesus. For Jairus to go to Jesus, was for Jairus to go to the other side. For Jairus to go to Jesus was for Jairus to begin to let go of some of his privilege and power. No one does this easily. In fact, sometimes we are only able to give up our privilege and power when not to give up our privilege and power will guarantee greater pain. Jesus full of grace, the one considered a dirty criminal, a defiled embarrassment, a religious blasphemer, gracefully goes with Jairus, honoring the courage it has taken him to kneel at his feet.

And then we read, "A large crowd followed Jesus and pressed in on him, there was a woman who had and she was no better, but rather grew worse."

Is there no physician? Is there no balm that can heal my bleeding life? She must have cried those words so often: bleeding, unclean, excluded, isolated, avoided, alone. Her joy was gone. Grief walked with her every day of her life.

Jairus implemented the laws of segregation, she suffered under them.

With incredible courage, she enters the crowd. She breaks out of her isolation and in doing so she is breaking the law, it is a criminal act. She is anemic, she is weak, she is frail, but she refuses to be powerless. She refuses to believe the lie that her life, her bleeding life does not matter and so she comes out—out of the closet of isolation. She reasons to herself, "If I am going to die inside here, I might as well die out there, for I have nothing to lose anymore."

Jairus, after years of privilege and power had internalized his sense of entitlement. She on the other hand had to fight internalizing her sense of worthlessness every single day.

We read, "she has heard about Jesus..." this is what happened when people hear about Jesus. She came up behind him in a crowd and touched his cloak. She says to herself, for she has no one else to talk to. She is used to talking to herself, "if I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." She knows deep in her being the healing power of touch. She knows the pain of not being touched.

Please notice that Jairus with all his privilege and power could come up to Jesus and demand health care for his daughter, but if she needed health care she needed to come up to Jesus and steal it from behind.

"Immediately her hemorrhage stopped and she felt in her body was healed from her disease." At last, confirmation that her bleeding life matters...at last. At last she faces down the lie that her life does not count. Jesus turned around aware that power had gone forth from him. Jesus does not hold onto his power; Jesus gives his power away! *When the powerful and the privileged give their power away, the bleeding stops.*

"Who touched me?" He wants to know who touched me. He knows a touch that has taken courage and he wants to honor it. He stops. Can you see where Jairus is? He is pacing up and down wondering when Jesus is going to come and save his daughter. Jairus is not used to waiting for anyone. As Jesus is engaging with this woman, a deep surgery

is happening in Jairus' life. The cancer of power and privilege is being cut out of his being as he has to wait, because for Jesus bleeding lives take priority over all the privilege and power in the world. For Jairus to be healed, he needs to learn to wait.

“This is right, this is acceptable in the sight of God our savior” says [Paul to] Timothy. “Who desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” Jesus desires everyone to be healed. Healthcare should not be restricted to those who are able to pay for health care alone.

The woman knowing what was happening “in fear and trembling, fell down and told him the whole truth.” Touch may heal us, but it is the truth that will finally liberate us and emancipate us from mental slavery. The narrator says she comes in fear, but Jesus sees her courage to come out, to reach out, to speak out, the whole truth. “Daughter your faith,” he meant to say your courage, your courage “has made you well go in peace and be healed of your disease.” Already her bleeding has stopped, so what is Jesus referring to. He is referring to the disease of her believing that she is less than. He gives her what she really needs. She doesn't just need a pint of blood, she needs family, a place of belonging, and so he claims her as his family, “Daughter, daughter, daughter.”

Then we read, messengers go to Jairus and tell him it is too late that his daughter is dead.

Jesus overhears the bad news that is spoken. He turns to Jairus and says to him, “Do not fear only believe.” The miracle in this passage is that Jairus does just this. He gives up some of his privilege and power, but what has it brought him? Death comes to his family, he should have known better. As we are on the journey of privilege and power there are always going to be triggers that tempt us to go back to our station of privilege and power, but Jesus says, “Just hang in here with me.” Jairus does.

They arrive at the house, Jesus gets rid of everybody and he raises his little girl from the dead.

I confess to you I am not completely sure what this means, but in the very least, the promise of this scripture is that when you and I bring the people we have always other-ed, when we bring those others into our home, and our family ... then our children will be resurrected from the death that our privilege and our prejudice causes.

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