

What are We Radiating?

Sermon on Mark 5: 21-43 (Jesus heals the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years and brings the twelve-year old girl back to life.)

June 27, 2021

FCC/SWC

Rev. Julie G. Olmsted

Here we have another well-known, poignant and deeply meaningful story about Jesus and human life in general, women in particular. This is a very adult story and we will examine some of the remarkable numerical and psychological aspects, ending up with an inquiry into the world of being (present moment, ontological being). For generations people have called God a Supreme Being. What we see Jesus demonstrating here is “supreme being.” That is to say, that he radiates something so powerful and life-affirming, those whom he touches or those who can even come close to him, touching “the hem of his garment” have the hope of healing, and even new life.

It is worth noting here the nature of the gospel of Mark. Mark, remember, is the first of the gospels, and the shortest as well. Mark is characterized by movement and swiftness of action (“At once,” “Immediately”). Jesus is being practically trampled by the throng of people hoping to catch a glimpse, hear a word, or receive some kind of healing or blessing. But Jesus is on the way to the home of Jairus, a man who is in charge of the services and care of the nearby synagogue. Word had been spreading about Jesus and there were certainly those who had great skepticism, but others who were excited about the possible coming of the Messiah. Jairus perhaps was somewhere in the middle. I imagine that he was skeptical but very curious. Until it got personal. His beloved twelve-year old daughter was deathly ill. Putting all doubts and personal concerns aside, Jairus subjugates all pride and position to ask Jesus if he would come to his house and heal his baby girl.

So, there’s lots of action here. Jesus, Peter, James and John are hot-footing it over to the home of Jairus (before it is too late). Throngs of people are competing to get just a whiff of Jesus, a glimpse or a touch. In the middle of this commotion, a woman cries out to be healed herself. The young girl who Jesus is hurrying to see about is twelve years old. The woman reaching out to Jesus in the streets has been bleeding for twelve years. Twelve years old is very young. Twelve years to deal with this affliction is a very long time. We see the paradoxical nature of time (twelve is a short time or a long time, depending). We see the persistence of an illness, one that is associated with barrenness and loss of life. Twelve is a significant number in our bible, as it often signifies the time about which God begins to do a new thing. Jesus ran off and hung out with his elders, speaking at the temple (and worrying his parents sick) at age twelve. He chose twelve disciples and even they drew lots to replace Judas to keep the number at an authoritative number *twelve*. Twelve tribes of Israel, twelve baskets remained full in the feeding of the 5,000. The number twelve is all over the place. Of course, it is divisible by four as the number 3, the most significant, because of the Trinity.

We have two life threatening situations here. One old, another young. Let's look together, however, at this idea of what Jesus was radiating. Jesus was steeped in his Jewish faith; he was not only observant, he was devout. All of us, you and I, can be "observant" without being devout. Devotion is full of heart, holding nothing back. Devotion does not separate Sunday from the rest of the week, at least in terms of who we are. Jesus had total unification of heart, mind and action. His mind was on one thing: pleasing God, doing God's will (one thing). His mind turned his heart toward the same thing. His actions followed, because all of us usually do what our hearts and minds engage in. Listen to this quote, attributed to the late supermarket mogul Frank Outlaw, president of Bi-Lo stores in Texas in 1977:

*Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become your habits. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.*

We do our spiritual practices of prayer, worship, giving, and forgiving, in order to prepare for our destiny. This, I'm thinking, is the way to surrender to the will of God. Every day, moment by moment. This is why Jesus radiated peace, hope, healing and mercy. Because he was faithful to his calling. He did not deviate. You and I? We deviate plenty. But ours is a God of grace and forgiveness, praise God. We get up. We start out, hoping to do better today than yesterday. We reach out and touch someone. We send a little note, say a little prayer, do a little kindness. We listen to another's point of view. We ponder God's law and God's Word. We ask for healing ourselves, for restoration and to be "made over." What a makeover, indeed, for all of us to radiate just a single watt of power, compared to the megawatts he radiated. But that's why we're here. To have our power be illuminated and amped up with the new. Why do you think we're called Children of the Light? I'm "charging" us to live up to that name.