

4 Pentecost 2009

Gospel: Mark 5:21-43

## ***Christ's Ministry of Transformation***

By Robert Bowler

In Mark's Gospel, as we have heard during recent Sundays in Pentecost, Jesus taught how the Reign of God will come here in our midst in parables: of the sower, the lamp on a stand, and the mustard seed. Now he begins his practical ministry of actually bringing the Reign of God into the concrete everyday life of people.

He stills the storm on the lake, bringing his inner peace to the disciples as well as to the lake itself. Having stilled the storm, he then rescued a man from a legion of demons. The man was broken, destroyed, and Jesus brought him back to a life of wholeness.

Time and again, it is the people's faith that transforms, and he is awakening that faith with his teaching and his example, bringing the Reign of God here and now.

Now Jesus returns with disciples back over the lake not just to ***teach*** but to ***do***. In essence, he says, "I have made you see the vision of the Reign of God, now let's begin the work of bringing it here, now, into the daily lives of the people."

So who is he and what is he bringing? If I had to say in a nutshell, in summary bullet points, if you will, here they are:

- He is the Messiah. He brings revolutionary overthrow of the present world order, but in unexpected, surprising ways.
- He exhibits qualities both human and divine. He is empathic and compassionate, paying attention to concrete detail, but also exhibits great power and might in doing so. We can talk to him as a friend but then step back in awe, fear and trembling, upon seeing him still the storm and heal the broken.
- He is among the people, the commoner, the sinner, the sick, the broken, the outcast, sowing faith in the God of Hope and Love.
- He asks those with faith to follow him and do as he does.

***Amen.*** That's it in a nutshell. Done.

Not quite, for it is our story too. The Reign of God is growing like a mustard seed, splitting the rock as Mary so beautifully explained last week. And while it has grown since Jesus' ministry, it still grows to completion in our midst. Our faith in following him today helps grow the Kingdom in our midst even now. So let's return to the Gospel.

The people had heard the parables and likely heard about the exorcism, and the crowd has swelled, each coming with their own sickness, sin and death in the midst of their lives, seeking wholeness and health again. They press upon him, even crying out.

A leader of the synagogue, one who regulated the Laws of purity in the temple, the last person to seek out Jesus for help, cried out in despair, “My little daughter is on the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.”

This man, who by all accounts should have been one of Jesus’ detractors, did not care if the whole village saw him kneeling at Jesus’ feet, did not care if his reputation as a religious official was destroyed, did not care anymore if Jesus was a threat to life as he knew it. He had tried everything to save his 12 year old daughter, and nothing of his own life had any value in the face of losing the life of his own flesh and blood.

So Jesus turned to go to the man’s house, but the crowd pressed on him. A woman, who had suffered hemorrhaging for 12 years, was pushing through the crowd to touch the hem of the shawl of the holy man thinking that doing so would heal her. Like the religious leader, she had also tried everything, spending all she had on physicians to no avail. Now she was not only an outcast but also impoverished. Suddenly Jesus felt power go from him, and asked “Who touches my clothes?” The woman, who was made healthy and whole, fell down before him in fear and trembling and told the truth of her healing. Jesus responded, “Your faith has made you well, go in peace.” Jesus did not take credit for the healing; it was the relationship she had with him, her faith, that healed. Her faith transformed her.

Then people came with the message that the daughter had died. But Jesus said, “do not fear, have faith, trust in the power of God.” They laughed at him, but he went to the house, took the girl by the hand and said, “Little girl, get up!” And she did, and all present were amazed. And what amazes me most is that Jesus told them to give her something to eat; his compassion is concrete; he is no abstract theologian; he pays attention to every minute detail. It is no wonder Julian of Norwich says that God in Jesus is our Mother; she “is wisdom, mercy, reforming, restoring, in whom our parts are united and all made perfect.” The family and all those with them then celebrated the new life faith had awakened from the sleep of death.

So it is faith that will bring healing and wholeness, new life, the Reign of God, into our midst. It is not belief in creeds and formulas, rites and rituals, rules and regulations, in and of themselves without the faith that gives them life. It is in our faithful relationship with the Christ who calls us to follow him in hope and love that the Reign of God is born in our midst. The leader of the synagogue believed in the Law, in fact it was his job, but the Law could not save his daughter. His despair brought him to his last hope, faith in the holy man that threatened his belief, which could destroy his very livelihood.

The woman’s faith, too, was stronger than her belief and that of her society. She was an impoverished outcast, who was forbidden to touch anyone because, also according to Jewish Law, all she touched became unclean. Her faith overcame these restrictions and she was made whole.

I imagine her, once she overcame her fear and trembling, celebrating new life with the family of the girl. After all, she may have been the girl's mother, for the girl was 12, and she had been bleeding for 12 years, perhaps from giving birth to the child. If so, they all had a lot to celebrate!

And now, Sunday after Sunday, we come here, to this church to celebrate. We may learn something, yes, we may affirm our belief by reciting the creed, yes, but above all, we come here to celebrate. And what do we celebrate in coming together? We celebrate our faith! The Eucharist in particular is our great celebration of faith. It is reaching out to touch the hem of his garment. It is shouting out for help in the midst of the crowd. It is an affirmation of our relationship with Christ embodied in our community, here and now. It is holding out our hands and hearts, receiving the strength to turn and follow Christ in bringing that faith to the world in ministry. It is celebrating the Reign of God here, now, in our midst, and then taking it out to the society beyond these walls, in words and example, as Jesus did. "Where two or more gather in my name, there I am," he said. We are Christ's body, here, now. It is our faith, celebrated in this place, each and every Sunday, that brings the health and wholeness of the Reign of God more and more to our broken world.

Let us pray, therefore, with St. Theresa, in celebration of our faith,

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no feet but yours, no hands but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion looks out on the world.  
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.  
Yours are the hands with which he blesses the world now. Amen*