“At the Intersection of Faith and Fear”

Mark 5:21-43

Rev. Rebecca Weaver Longino

First Presbyterian Church, Luling, TX

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Today we hear the story of two miraculous healings.

I think there’s a certain risk in reading such stories.

They might get our hopes up that we can pray for a miraculous healing for ourselves or our loved ones.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve sat with a family in the hospital and have them look to me as the chaplain to pray for a miracle.

“But it happens in the Bible!” They exclaim.

There are a lot of things that happen in Scripture, which don’t seem to happen anymore.

Miraculous healing is one of them.

But if we read this story closely, we might just find that there is so much more to healing –

Beyond getting rid of their illness or dire situation –

Rather, healing is a much broader experience.

Going beyond just eliminating the ailment.

Let us continue to listen for the Word of God in Mark chapter 5, staring at verse 21…

This Gospel passage tells us of two women in need of help.

They are two very different women.

One is older and has been dealing with bleeding for 12 years.

We know she must at least be in her 20s.

She is now poor, having spent all of her money on doctors’ bills, trying to find a cure.

So she lives on the streets, destitute.

She has been cut off from her community due to her unclean state.

Women were considered unclean during their menstrual cycle.

So she had experienced isolation for 12 years.

She has no one.

She has no one to advocate for her.

No one to seek out healing on her behalf, so he takes matters into her own hands when she reaches out to Jesus.

The girl, on the other hand, is young.

Just on the cusp of childbearing age, she is on the boundary between child and adult.

She comes from a wealthy and powerful family.

She is surrounded by her family during her illness.

She has the resources to pay doctors and get care.

She has her father who fights on her behalf.

He’s the one who seeks out Jesus to heal his daughter.

But these two women have one thing in common.

They are both sick.

They are both on the brink of death.

They are both in need of healing.

Ramona Pierson knows how it feels to be in these women’s shoes.[[1]](#footnote-1)

She was once on the brink of death and in need of healing.

About 30 years ago, she was out for a run with her dog.

As she crossed a street, a drunk driver ran the red light, hitting Pierson and her dog.

Her beloved pet died on the scene, and she nearly did as well.

Rescue workers acted quickly to stabilize her, but she was in very bad shape.

She had major trauma to her chest, resulting in a ruptured aorta and collapsed lung.

Her leg was seemingly beyond repair and the rest of her body was torn apart.

She was taken to a hospital and went through surgery after surgery – more than 50 total.

Then was put into a drug-induced coma for 18 months.

When she woke up, she was blind, couldn’t speak and couldn’t walk.

And she weighed only 64 pounds.

She didn’t have any friends or family, so the hospital had no idea what to do with her.

She no longer needed to be hospitalized, but she certainly couldn’t go live by herself.

Pierson says the hospital basically put a map on the wall and threw a dart on it.

As a result, she was sent to a senior home in northwestern Colorado.

Blind, mute, and unable to walk, at the age of 22, Pierson was now a resident of a nursing home.

Joining the company of those who were near the end of their lives, it seems she too was at the end of her life.

But the residents of that nursing home weren’t going to let that happen.

When she arrived, the residents had a meeting and asked themselves “Okay, what skills do we have in this room? This kid needs a lot of work.”

And just like that they turned her into their project.

They drew upon their skills and experience to help her find healing.

It started out with helping to eat.

She had to relearn that skill after being tube fed for over a year.

Then they gave her a makeover, complete with polyester clothing with loud floral prints.

They had to use what they had on hand.

They helped furnish her room, collecting extra things they had to make it a home.

Next came speaking.

They knew that if she were to become an independent person, she needed to relearn speech.

The men at the senior living home took this task upon themselves.

At night they would secretly teach her to play cuss-word Scrabble.

Teaching her to swear like a sailor!

Pierson still laughs when she thinks about the first words she spoke.

The residents helped her to write and walk and cook for herself.

All of these steps were important for Pierson to find healing.

But she says the pivotal moment was when she had to learn to cross the street as a blind person.

She panicked every time she tried.

There were two obstacles in her way.

One, was the trauma of what had happened the last time she’d crossed a street.

That time when a drunk driver nearly ended her life.

The second obstacle was the issue of crossing without being able to see.

Something she’d never done before.

One of the seniors had a simple solution: she told her to walk up to the curb and stick her cane out into the street.

If it got hit, the woman said, don’t cross the street!

Well, this strategy didn’t work so well, so the seniors pooled their resources to send Pierson to a special school where she could learn how to function as a blind person.

And then they helped get her a guide dog.

Something that went above and beyond the call to help.

When all was said and done, Pierson was able to go to college and live independently.

She eventually had some experimental surgeries that would fix the hematomas behind her eyes.

And she regained her vision.

Now Pierson has made quite the life for herself, as a CEO of a company in Silicon Valley.

If you saw her, you’d never know she’d had such a close encounter with death.

All because a few folks at a senior living center made her their project.

They spent the time working with her, helping her, healing her.

When she speaks about that experience, she conveys deep gratitude for what those folks did for her.

Not only did they help her heal physically, they helped her emotionally as she worked through the trauma she experienced.

They became her family.

Something she had been without for such a long time.

And they helped her spiritually, when she was able to overcome her fear of the future and of crossing the street and regaining her life.

The people needing help in our scripture today find themselves at their own intersection of faith and fear.

For the woman who bled, she feared what would happen if the bleeding continued.

And then she feared what Jesus would do when she confessed she touched his garment.

Being unclean, this was reprehensible act for her to do.

For Jairus, he was afraid his daughter would die.

And then he feared what would happen if Jesus didn’t get there in time.

And so the woman and Jairus stand at the intersection of faith and fear.

Hoping for the best, but expecting the worst.

To the woman, Jesus says, your faith has made you well.

Go in peace, and be healed of your disease.

Just like that, he sends her on her way, with a fresh start.

She didn’t need to fear how Jesus would respond to her.

She is evidently healed from the bleeding.

But she’s also given the healing of being made clean and allowed back into her community.

Isolation will no longer be her punishment.

To Jairus, who was afraid Jesus had missed his chance to help his daughter.

Jesus says, “Do not fear, only believe.”

I’d like to think Jesus was super calm in the midst of this chaotic scene.

With a demeanor like Mr. Rogers, gently telling Jairus not to be afraid.

Of course he knows how devastated Jairus is when he believes he lost his daughter.

But Jesus is able to see beyond the situation, and knows it will end well.

They head back to Jairus’ house and find the daughter dead.

But Jesus knows resurrection is possible, and he brings that little girl back to life.

Restoring her life and restoring Jairus’ faith.

When we find ourselves at that intersection of faith and fear, we can remember these words of Jesus.

Do not fear, only believe.

Believe that God is with you.

That God is there in the most frightening of times.

Believe that God can see beyond what we can.

That God has the bigger picture in view.

Do not fear, only believe.

Believe that healing will come.

It might not look like what we expect or pray for.

It might not mean a cure for our illness.

But healing will come.

Do not fear, only believe.

Believe that healing might arrive in the form of family and friends and neighbors.

Those who surround us with love.

Believe that healing might arrive in the form of strangers.

Like Ramona Pierson’s neighbors at that senior housing complex.

Do not fear, only believe.

Believe that God can see the bigger picture.

God will respond when we reach out in faith.

God will put people in our lives to help us through.

God will take on our fears and give us comfort.

Telling us do not fear, only believe.

1. http://www.ted.com/talks/ramona\_pierson\_an\_unexpected\_place\_of\_healing/transcript?language=en [↑](#footnote-ref-1)