

A Balancing Act

Sunday, June 28

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If you are a lectionary-follower, then you probably know that we are in the midst of Year B and that for the next couple of weeks the Gospel readings come from Mark. If you are not a lectionary-follower no big deal, you have probably caught on and realized that the past two Sundays our Gospel readings have been from none other than the Gospel of Mark.

Last week, we heard about Jesus and his disciples on the Sea of Galilee during a storm. The storm was terrifying, but Jesus' words of "Peace, be still" ceased the wind and brought a calm to the sea. Two weeks ago, Tom guided us in exploring Jesus' parables about seeds ... how God is the one that brings about the spiritual growth in our lives and how the kingdom of God is like a small mustard seed that grows into greatest shrub of all.

The Gospel of Mark is truly an action-packed, wisdom nugget-filled, fast-paced story of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God! It is exciting to explore this gospel over several weeks as we strive to learn more about Jesus through Mark's words. Our scripture lesson for today comes from Mark 5: 21-43. Let us listen for the Word of God:

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the lake. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.' So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.'

Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"'

He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?' But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.' He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.

When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him.

Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age).

At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

This is the Word of God. **Thanks be to God.**

This story of Jesus along the shores of Galilee brings images to my mind of the recent headline involving Robert Pattinson, *Twilight* actor and current teen heartthrob. Last week while Pattinson was filming in New York City he was hit by a taxicab because he was trying to escape a mob of fans desiring a picture and autograph. These fans were invading his personal space so much that he felt the need to escape ... and fast.

People watch Pattinson's movies and become entranced by his portrayal of the beautiful and mystical character of Edward Cullen. They thrive on news of his latest film project, girlfriend, or dinner out on the town. In a similar way, people in 1st century Palestine devoured the latest gossip about a man named Jesus from Nazareth who healed people and cast out demons and preached in the local synagogue.

Not unlike fans in New York City last week, people wanted to be near Jesus ... they wanted to hear his voice ... to touch him ... to receive his power. People were pushing ... shoving ... crowding him ... it was probably hot and dusty and suddenly a major figure of the Jewish faith fell at Jesus' feet and BEGGED him to save his ailing daughter. Jesus began to follow Jairus and the crowd swelled and continued to press in on him when suddenly he felt a distinct tug at his clothes...he instinctively knew it was not just someone brushing against him.

Can you imagine how desperately these people desired an encounter with Jesus? Robert Pattinson is simply a teen heartthrob whose movie will be popular today and forgotten tomorrow. Jesus is the Son of God, the divine healer, the ever compassionate friend and neighbor to those in need.

Jesus is doing quite the balancing act where we pick up our study of Mark's Gospel today. He has just been caught in a storm with scared disciples, helped a man with a demon named Legion, and upon his return to Galilee he was met by a great crowd that gathered around and pressed in on him. Then, he had two people request different things from him at the same time.

He, like Robert Pattinson, probably felt claustrophobic and would have loved nothing more than to escape and rest or wash up after his recent activities in the Gentile country, or simply spend

some time alone in prayer. I bet we can all relate to some of these feelings that the crowd and requests of people in need may have aroused in Jesus.

We have been in similar situations before when everyone and everything seems to be demanding our time and attention. A big project needs to be finished for work the next day, but after the Tuesday evening Taize service at church a visitor asks if you could take him to the hospital to visit his sick brother.

Your home is in need of repairs that need to be taken care of sooner rather than later but a friend needs someone to stay with her for a couple of days after a major surgery. You have a big project due at school but your parents need you to watch after your siblings while they visit your grandfather in the hospital.

A neighbor who needs help moving furniture knocks on your door 2 hours before you and your spouse will host 25 friends for dinner. At the end of a long and grueling day of work at the new Habitat for Humanity community, someone asks for a ride home 20 minutes out of your way.

While you are trying to grab dinner to go on your way to a committee meeting at church someone approaches you to ask for directions and information about a local night shelter. What I feel like I need in these times is some Balance ... I need to find some peace, some calm and a way to balance all the requests upon my time and energy.

BALANCE ... I feel like I have dealt with the issue of balance a great deal recently. Perhaps that is because in the past two months I have had a lot going on: final exams at the seminary, wedding planning, the actual wedding, a real-life marriage, beginning work here at Columbia Presbyterian, moving to a new home. And ... all of this stuff is on top of my normal activities ... nurturing friendships, volunteering, catching up with family members on the phone, worshipping regularly, spending time in prayer, exercising.

All of us here this morning can relate to feelings of pressure and a desire for balance ... we can get a glimpse of how busy Jesus was during his human ministry on earth ... My question simply is ... How did Jesus do it? It is difficult for me to take care of everything in my life and give attention to my friends and family ... how could I fit in helping strangers I meet along the way?

In situations that seemed impossible, Jesus managed to give attention, time, and even love to those he encountered--The paralyzed man whose friends lowered him from the roof, his closest companions known as the disciples, his adversaries known as the Pharisees, the demoniac who no one wanted to touch because he was unclean and lived in the tombs, and even two females who were the outcasts of society.

While I have been pondering our passage from Mark this past week I have liked to think of it as Jesus' divine balancing act. I think Barbara Brown Taylor would probably refer to this scenario as Jesus' divine practice of encounter. In her new book, *An Altar in the World*, she devotes one chapter to the practice of encountering others. She, like me, stands in awe of Jesus' encounter and care for human beings and questions, "Who has the time?" All of the scenarios I presented a

few moments ago would have us screaming the same question and all of those scenarios coincidentally involved encountering fellow human beings.

Taylor points out that a real human encounter is as close to God as we can ever get. Why? Because we are made in the image of God ... encountering humans and balancing our lives so that we can encounter others is truly a holy act. Let us never forget that our God became human and walked this earth. Our God became incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth in order to encounter other humans. Jesus took the time to encounter the hemorrhaging woman in the crowd and Jairus and his daughter. Neither of these women is named in Mark's narrative, but Jesus' love and attention gives them worth.

Jesus speaks to them with words filled with care and concern. He questions, "Who touched me?" when others think it is insignificant who touched him in such a large crowd. When he notices the woman is full of fear he calls her "daughter" and compliments her faith and bids her to go in peace, healed of her disease.

When Jairus is distraught because his daughter is thought to be dead, Jesus comforts him with the words, "Do not fear, only believe." At Jairus' house, Jesus takes the hand of the girl and says, "little girl, get up."

Some may hear these words and think them simple and unimportant, but to me they are "sticky words." By sticky words, I mean they make an impression on me and stick with me after I have put my Bible away. When I am writing emails or on a walk they echo in the back of my mind. I think these are very wise words because they give us a glimpse of Jesus and they give us a model to follow. They are simple phrases that ask a question, state the facts, command an action, or calm someone down, but they are important to the encounter Jesus has with the people in this passage. All it takes to encounter another person is a simple word, a pause to acknowledge a presence, a question to clarify the situation, a handshake.

A question popped into my mind the other day while I was sitting in the church office working ... I was preparing for a Sunday school lesson when the phone rang. I answered it and it was a man selling children's picture Bibles. I thought to myself, what church needs another Bible? We at Columbia are chock full of them! I told him he could send us some information and then hung up.

Two minutes later the phone rang again and it was the same man. He had accidently called us again. Some people might get irritated that their work had been interrupted yet again by a salesperson but as I politely hung up I thought to myself ... would Jesus speak a kind word to a salesperson or a telemarketer? He probably would ... remember, he made time to help an unclean woman and a young girl when he probably had a million other things to do.

Every human encounter is a gift ... it is our opportunity to seek God ... it is our opportunity to proclaim God's kingdom. Let Jesus be the model for us of balance in the Christian life ... let Jesus be the model for the practice of divine encounter with others. While we may not share Jesus' gift of divine healing, we can bring healing to the hearts and souls of our fellow human by small acts filled with love in the name of Jesus Christ.

God has a gift and opportunity waiting for us when we keep a friend company after surgery instead of working on home repairs or when we take the time to buy a stranger a glass of lemonade on a hot day and share a conversation. Because when we bring some balance to our lives and encounter others as they come, we draw close to our Lord and our God in whose image we are created.