Karen Hollis

Sermon – Mark 5:21-43

July 1, 2018

Canada Day and CCG Birthday

When asked how her faith has changed over the course of her life, The Most Reverend Katherine Jefferts Schori responded, “I understand faith . . . in the sense of faithfulness in relationship. It’s filled with hope and expectation. It’s a dynamic relationship and if we’re struck somewhere it means there’s more to do. That feeling of wandering in the desert or the dark night of the soul is a sign that something is germinating if we’re willing to have patience and suffer that darkness.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Even as the first female Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church of America, her story of faith contains common human themes: loss, struggle, searching, deepening, connecting . . . drawn forward by a sense that there is something greater at work than what we can see. Ben and Jock, the founders of the Haven define faith as “the felt sense of the assurance of the continuity of life.”[[2]](#footnote-2) It is that felt sense of God inviting us deeper and deeper into relationship with the one who created and is creating. It is that felt sense that our God will take our humanity and create life, no matter what darkness we experience.

Darkness takes many forms, for instance a parent with a deathly ill child or a woman not only with a 12- year illness but having to deal with it in isolation. While despair is a natural human response to such concerns, both the synagogue leader and this unnamed woman do not despair in the presence of Jesus, rather have faith enough to risk their place in the social construct in order to seek healing. Because of her flow of blood, the unnamed woman will make unclean anyone she touches, so in their world view, she is risking making Jesus ritually unclean, as well as anyone else she encounters as she pushes through that tight crowd of people. She risks being outed as one cast to the fringes of society by seeking healing from this most public figure. At the same time, we have a ruler of the synagogue, a man of means, and one representing the establishment that is resisting the way Jesus upsets the status quo. This synagogue leader will certainly have much to answer for when this ordeal is over. But who they are and the context from which they come are secondary to the life they see possible through Jesus.

They are willing to risk everything because they have faith that there is life beyond their current concerns. They believe that this is not the end of the story, and our Creating God has more in store than this.

Imagine the power of God coming through your body, taking hold of you, right in the place where it hurts . . . and in that instant, all of your thoughts and feelings and history with this pain converge in that place, and that power turns all of it upside down and flows through you into the ground as quickly as it came. What happened? Something happened . . . she knows it and Jesus knows it. But the real power in the story is what comes next. Jesus does not cast her away, but turns to her, listens to her truth and calls her daughter. He welcomes her in the center of the community and breaks down the barriers to her isolation. Through touch, emotional connection and affirmation she is made new to live a full life.

Things now seem bleak for the little girl – common sense and all the people around them say why bother, even laugh at Jesus’ persistence. Jesus gathers the family together and boots everyone else out – he brings the family together with the little girl, takes her hand and tells her to rise. With touch and words of affirmation – arise! give her something to eat, the living eat – Jesus brings healing yet again. Touch, connection, affirmation – it is powerful, yet it is not magic, and it’s not rocket science, it is good practice, the practice of healing.

My friend Susan Clark from the Haven put it this way in a poem called Loved:

The path to healing is one which leads into discomfort

There is no easy way to open old wounds

 Without allowing them to bleed

And pain is so often the price of awareness, wisdom and love

Warriors may choose to walk alone

 Experiencing life’s dramas with power and fortitude

 Crying in silence, dying in isolation

They become the heroes – the glorified

 But rarely the loved

Love comes in sharing

 Watching, feeling and allowing

 My pain to mix with yours

It is in these shared experiences I find my strength

 To face life’s dramas with faith and confidence

For I am not alone

Your tears have become my strength,

 My courage to let go of my own

I treasure the tears we have shared

 Just as I treasure our joy

It leads me down my path

 Less afraid to bleed

Taking the steps to healing

 Not dying in isolation

No hero

 Worn and torn

 . . . . LOVED!!

 We are not alone in our suffering and our healing, still many of us wonder, why doesn’t Jesus heal in this way anymore? It was a question that pursued me until I realized, he does heal in this way. I spoke in a previous sermon about congregations that regularly practice physical healing; through a practice based on the way Jesus healed in the gospels, God heals, not everyone every time, yet people experience healing. But because of our modern lens on the story, the tendency is to focus on the physical healing, when that was only one element of what Jesus offered. As we practice this faith year after year, we learn the depth and breadth of how God touches our lives. We learn that healing is as much a matter of the heart and spirit as it is of the body. I heard a story recently of a man of deep faith, who was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease when he was still in his fifties. He and his wife prayed that he might be healed. Twenty years later, he finds himself in the last debilitating stages of the disease. Nevertheless, he says his prayers have been answered. He says in all sincerity, “I have been healed, not of Parkinson’s disease, but I have been healed of my fear of Parkinson’s disease.”[[3]](#footnote-3) We learn over time that prayers are not answered in the way we pray them, but in the love and wisdom of God. In the midst of our prayer, God continues to create and continues to bring life. And we grow a faith in God to draw us close and know we are not alone; we grow in faith that God brings us together other in the practice of healing and God will show up, that we may be transformed. Amen.

1. Parabola Magazine: Faith, Spring 2007, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The (New) Manual For Life, Wong & McKeen, p. 69 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Feasting on the Word, Year B Vol 3, p. 190 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)