

Title: Illustrations of Faith

Subtitle: Finding a foundation for faith amid life's adversities

Video URL: https://youtu.be/iy_JdJ256fc

In last's week's Gospel, Jesus was found sleeping in the midst of a storm. When he was awakened, he asked the frightened disciples, **“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”** In today's Gospel Jesus tells the anxious synagogue ruler, **“Do not fear, only believe,”**¹ It seems like the pendulum swing between faith and fear common to us all, especially when we face uncertainty and circumstances that threaten our existence. Fear alerts us to danger, and it raises our adrenaline levels so that all of our resources will be focused on a solution. But sometimes, we find ourselves in such deep water that human resources alone are not enough.

Our Gospel today presents us with two individuals who show us what faith in action looks like as they each face overwhelming adversity. Our text opens with Jairus, a synagogue ruler, who comes to Jesus and says, **“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.”**² Here is a man who was willing to venture beyond the comforts of a domesticated religious system of rules to a radical openness beyond anything he has ever known. I identify with Jairus because he moves from being what could be considered a cautious, culture-pleasing, religious person—who knows all the right procedures and all the right rules—to being a radical risk-taker in search of the power of the Kingdom of Heaven manifested through the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jairus could have easily given up hope, thrown in the towel, shaken his fist at heaven, and passively opted for **“what will be.”** But he doesn't. Instead, out of love, he reaches for help from the only one who can provide help. In desperation and love he is willing to take risks.

Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest, and best selling author describes faith in the following way:

¹ Mark 5:36

² Mark 5:23

“Faith is not a well-fluffed nest or a well-defended castle high on a hill. It is more like a rope bridge over a scenic gorge, sturdy but swing back and forth, with precious little to hang on to except the stories you have heard: that is the best and only way across. ...But if Jesus was who he said he was, the bridge will hold. Believing in him will not put us in charge, ...or even save us from all harm. But by believing in him, we may gradually lose our fear....”³

Therefore, the faith that Jairus exercised is one where he not only came to Jesus, he followed Jesus, even when it meant hoping against hope; even when “...some people came from the leader’s house and said, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?’”⁴ His faith, as it turns out, meant walking with Jesus, regardless of what was seen.

The other story concerns “a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.”⁵ Her hemorrhage is a picture of anything in our own lives that drain us strength and vitality. I love the way that Lucy Strandlund users her imagination to describe this event in one of her sermons. She writes:

“She has tried everything. She has done everything money can buy. She has seen countless doctors and has only grown worse. But something in her still hopes. Despite all she has been through, something in her believes, trusts, even *expects* that if she simply reaches out and touches the edge of Jesus’ cloak, she will be healed.

She does not approach Jesus with the intention of falling before him or even of speaking to him. Perhaps she doesn’t want to bother or inconvenience him. All she wants is to touch his cloak and then maybe slip away, unnoticed yet healed. She comes up behind him and reaches for his hem. She immediately feels healing within her. She might have escaped through the crowd, except that Jesus feels the exchange as well. He begins to look around the

³ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, p. 94

⁴ Mark 5:35

⁵ Mark 5:25

densely packed crowd, asking, “Who touched me?” The disciples are befuddled, and Jairus is likely impatient, but Jesus is insistent.

Whether out of self-consciousness or out of sheer awe at what has happened to her, the woman steps forward and shares her story with Jesus in front of the crowd.”⁶

Here was a woman who was willing to confess “the whole truth” about her condition. Her hemorrhage was a condition that rendered her “unclean,” and as such, she was excluded from public worship. Furthermore, by touching Jesus, she was exposing him to her uncleanness. The risk that she took is that he would react like the rest of the world—with rejection and walk away in disgust—thinking that her touch had contaminated him.

But she must have heard that Jesus was not like that. He was a person who touched lepers and dined with tax collectors and sinners and even cast out demons. In short, that Jesus loved the unlovely.

When I read these stories, there is something in my heart that is drawn like steel to a magnet, wanting to know more about this living dynamic we call faith. It is from this inner sense of being drawn that we can’t help but ask questions. Questions like, “How is faith possible when there seems to be no hope?” To answer that question, we need to understand what faith is, and how it is different from fear. Fear looks at what is seen, whereas faith looks at what is unseen.⁷ Elsewhere in scriptures, we read, “**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**”⁸ The original word for “assurance”⁹ comes from the combination of two Greek words. The prefix “under” is used to modify the verb “to stand.” Together they picture faith as a foundation upon which we stand. In “The New Covenant” or “New Testament,” we stand under a guaranteed agreement based upon our Lord’s precious death and sacrifice, which was ratified by his

⁶ Lucy Strandlund, Sermons that Work, 2021

⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:18 “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

⁸ Hebrews 11:1

⁹ Strong’s Concordance #5287 **hypostasis**, (from [5259](#) /hypó, “under” and [2476](#) /hístēmi, “to stand”)

resurrection. It is in this assurance that life has conquered death that we are given an ability to hope, regardless of what life may throw at us.

The woman in our Gospel story had the courage to admit the truth about her humble condition. Jesus affirmed her faith by addressing her as “**Daughter**.” Then he adds, “**your faith has made you well.**”¹⁰ Because of her faith, she was no longer an outcast but a beloved child of God, who Jesus gladly welcomed home. We, too, can receive that welcome when we admit the truth about ourselves. For “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”¹¹

In the rite one’s prayer of humble access, we recite these words:

“We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.”¹²

This mercy is something that we all long to receive. It is written about in Romance novels and dramatically presented popular movies, where the fear of admitting the truth about oneself emerges over and over again. The crisis in these stories always begins when individuals tell lies in order to cover up unlovable details about their background or situation. The fear comes from the false belief that love could not survive if the truth about themselves is ever fully revealed. But Jesus tells us otherwise. The truth, he tells us, is what sets us free.

My story with Ellen is a case in point. It took a year before I ended the foolish games I was playing before I finally admitted the truth concerning my affections for her.

Faith can overcome fear if we are willing to face the truth about ourselves and believe that we are fully accepted and forgiven. The author of Hebrews tells us that we have a high priest who knows all

¹⁰ Mark 5:34

¹¹ 1 John 1:9

¹² BCP p. 337, Prayer of Humble Access

about our weaknesses and failings. Therefore, “*... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*”¹³

So let’s take hold of the hope that is set before us, that we are claimed as sons and daughters of God even when we have character qualities that make us feel unloveable. Therefore, we can go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord. *Amen.*

Reflection Questions

- In what ways do you see yourself pushing against circumstances in order to express faith in Jesus?
- The woman with the hemorrhage did not let her sickness define her but reached out in spite of what others would think. Jesus affirmed her faith by claiming her as “Daughter,” a child of God. How is God calling you to claim your identity as a child of God?

¹³ Hebrews 10:21-23