

6.30.2024 Pentecost 6

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Lamentations 3:22-33; Psalm 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

“The generosity of faith”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today’s readings speak of Christ’s generosity to us and our faithful response to God and our neighbor. In two profound stories, Jesus identifies healing with faith, and Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth speaks of faith as a response to the generous act of Christ who, in sharing the poverty of our humanity, makes us rich in grace and faith.

Today’s gospel begins much like last week with Jesus crossing the Sea of Galilee, a barrier and boundary, to go to the other side to reach people in God’s mission of love for this world. In healing a both woman who was considered ritually unclean because of her illness and a child whose body was thought to be dead and could not be touched, Jesus crossed ritual barriers and boundaries separating the sick and the dead to offer healing, peace, and new life.

When Jesus arrived on the other side a great crowd gathered around him on the seashore. Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, fell at Jesus’ feet and pleaded with him, “*My little daughter is at the point of death. Come lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.*”

As Jesus went with him, the crowd pressed in, and believing that she would be made well, a woman who had suffered hemorrhages for 12 years reached out and touched his cloak. In both stories, healing occurs because someone reached out in faith to Jesus. Jesus quickly links this faith with healing, saying to the woman, “*Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace,*” and again to Jairus, “*Do not be afraid; only believe.*”

It is significant that Jesus did not draw attention to himself; but rather, Jesus pointed to the faith of the one believing. Rather than saying, “Only I can make you better,” Jesus’ was far more nuanced and direct; pointing to faith, Jesus reveals a divine power already alive within us. Only through faith do we come to know Jesus’ power as the mediator of God’s grace. Jesus pointed beyond himself to God’s grace already alive within us.

Though Jairus’s name is recorded, it is significant that neither the woman nor the young girl is named. By calling both simply, “daughter,” Jesus reveals God’s concern for us as God’s children at every age and stage of our lives.

As I think about my own life, perhaps like you, every Sunday from the time I was a small boy until today, I have come into God’s presence with hands outstretched seeking healing,

understanding, and reconciliation. Whether here in this sanctuary or among God's people in another nation, I know that Christ crosses all barriers and boundaries with a love and forgiveness that heals lives no matter our language, nationality, or identity. We come bearing real struggles, questions, illnesses, and regrets, believing that Jesus is in this place. We come with hands outstretched to touch him in bread and wine. We come with hands willing to give and to serve. One of my favorite stained-glass windows in this church is at the top of the stairs just outside the balcony entrance. The window is titled: "The Beloved Physician" – please take a moment to go upstairs and see it. Over and over in our lives, Jesus is the healer of our every ill so that healed we might serve others.

Has there been some moment in your life when, like Jairus or the woman, faith has driven you to your knees in prayer, or when faith has caused you to reach out to Jesus for help? Has there been some moment in which you have felt fearful and at the very limits of your physical, emotional, or material resources in which you have turned to Christ in faith? These two unnamed daughters invite us to see ourselves in them.

Faith makes us well, even as we are filled with fear and trembling. As Jesus told the woman, "*Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace,*" so Jesus sends us with a peace that overcomes the barriers of sickness and death with the grace of healing and new life. Like her, you possess a faith that overcomes fear with courage and peace. Like her, Jesus sends you to live not only for yourself, but to generously give peace and healing to others.

This is what Paul is driving at in his letter to the church at Corinth. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to live and act generously for others. Paul reminds them that they "*excel in everything*" – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in eagerness, and in love. Paul also encourages them to overcome the barriers they may have with the generosity of faith, sharing their abundance with others.

Paul encourages them to fulfill their promise made a year earlier to undertake an offering, a financial collection, for the church in Jerusalem struggling with persecution and famine. Imagine giving to a church or to people whom you have never met. It is far easier to give to people or causes we know or feel we will benefit from. However, as Christ healed the divisions and troubles in their church, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to respond generously, giving to the needs of others.

Over and over as a missionary, I saw churches, both in this country and in Japan, give with the generosity of faith for the work of Jesus Christ. Like the Corinthians, we give so that God's mission of love will reach all people across all barriers with healing and peace. Paul uses the example of

Jesus saying, “*For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*” In sharing our humanity, Jesus shows us what our humanity is capable of. Jesus heals our every ill, giving us peace and hope beyond our fears.

We are like the Corinthians. Christ has overcome divisions and barriers in this church helping us experience the profound peace and unity of Christ, who welcomes all people with unconditional love. Like the Corinthians, over a year ago we also began a work of faith, eager in our vision to call an associate pastor to this church. Like the Corinthians, we must now “*finish doing...this generous undertaking.*” We must financially support this bold vision, believing in the generous act of Christ alive in us, always moving us from fear to acts of faith.

As Paul said to the church at Corinth, we will need your generosity, so that together we might live into a new chapter of our mission and ministry. St. Mark’s is a generous church, and together we are Christ’s body and hands, reaching out to touch the world around us with healing, love, and peace. I encourage you to fulfill our bold vision for the future with the generosity of faith.

Jesus shares your humanity so that the generosity of faith might live through your hands and voices. Jesus shares your humanity so that through you people might know his love.

How will you continue to respond to the gift of faith? *Do not be afraid; only believe.* You are his hands and voices.

Live generously knowing that Christ lives through you. Amen.