

Sermons at Christ Church

Be a Joyful Gift to Others.

Pentecost 4

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“Do not fear, only believe.” Jesus assures Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. Fear can be debilitating. Fear cripples us into inaction and often renders us incapable of being visionary, proactive, productive and functional. Fear sucks up all our energy, creating a wall around us. And that wall, not only becomes our enemy but it hampers growth. Fear worsens our problems because we get the sense that no one is interested in helping us.

But for growth to be possible, for healing to be possible, for change to be possible, to secure the help we need, we have to conquer our fears with a courage rooted in our belief in God. I remember a President who once said “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” This President anchored a desperate nation in confidence and hope amidst the Great Depression. In the midst of anxiety, when millions of people had lost so much, President Roosevelt invited Americans not to fear but to believe in the American spirit.

In the gospel, Mark tells the story of an anxious and desperate Jairus. He had a sick daughter who was probably near death. Jairus had probably heard about Jesus and so like any parent would do, he runs to Jesus seeking mercy for his daughter.

Remember that Jairus was a leader of the Synagogue, and for someone in such a leadership position, it was preposterous for him to go seek help from Jesus of all people. How was he going to explain his actions to those who opposed Jesus and found him to be an imposter? How was he going to explain himself to the very people who thought that Jesus was diluting the law? But these questions which were borne out of fear were not enough to dissuade him from taking action to save his daughter’s life. He came to Jesus and confessed-I need help.

It didn’t matter to him what kind of person Jesus claimed to be, all he cared about was that this person can bring healing to my daughter. All he cared about was that this person can bring

restoration to my daughter. All he cared about was that this man can bring relief to my daughter and in fact, that is all that mattered. He wasn't crippled by his fear.

He had such an unbridled courage-the kind of courage which is rooted in his belief that Jesus could heal the daughter. Do not fear, only believe.

Jarius knew that for his daughter to be made whole, he had to take that one step that placed his faith squarely in the hands of Jesus. Upon hearing Jarius' plea from the depth of human helplessness, Jesus made a turn and walked with Jarius to his home. If Jarius thought that Jesus had no value for him, he was wrong.

But as Jesus made his way to Jairus' home, something strange happened. There was a woman among the crowd who has been sick for twelve years. She had traveled far and wide to see all the experts. She was as desperate as they come. She's been to Mayo Clinic, she's been to Hopkins, and she's seen the best doctors around. And yet no one could help her. She is helpless. She was as desperate as Jarius. And you can possibly hear her cry of agony and desperation from the depths in which she found herself. She faced the horror of her illness each morning.

I had an uncle who used to say you wake up in the morning and feel some pain in your body, that means you are alive. This woman was alive but wished she was dead. And then she heard that Jesus was in town.

Her condition has made her unclean and so she cannot be around people. Thankfully, no one in the crowd knew what she was dealing with.

She sees the crowd and is intimidated by it. I need help but how can I get this man's attention? I believe he can heal me, I believe he can restore me to wholeness. I believe he can put a new song in my mouth-a song of thanksgiving. But how can I tell him what my burdens are? I know I can lay my burdens at his feet, but how? Do not fear, only believe.

I heard a story a couple of days ago about a friend who is battling stage four cancer. He has been going through chemo. He got a call from his doctor, and thinking that he had some good news for him, he put the phone on speaker. The doctor shared with him that the chemo doesn't seem to be

working and there seem to be little that can be done. His son overheard what the doctor said and was totally heartbroken.

You may have had a loved one hear similar depressing news. You may have been heartbroken by those words which speak of human helplessness. That's how both Jarius and the woman felt.

She couldn't let the size of the crowd intimidate her, she couldn't let her uncleanness and the fact that she was a woman be her impediment. She had everything to gain and nothing to lose. She couldn't be crippled by fear into inaction.

If only I can touch the hem of his garment, I will be made well. If only I can overcome my fear and touch him, I will be made whole. And so she did. And that very moment she was healed.

What fears do you carry with you? Who and what is it that generates fear in you? And to whom do you go with these fears? There is a difference between fear and worry. I do not fear, I worry. I do not fear because my belief in God is such that I cannot be afraid. But I worry.

A few days ago, I graduated with Jan and John from the college of congregational development. It is a two week program in two years. I highly recommend it to you.

One of the models we studied at the college was the iceberg model. Like the titanic, all that people saw was a big beautiful ship with a lot of people but no one saw the iceberg that was in the water and below surface. The point of the model is, in an organization like ours, what most people see is the stuff above the water.

It is like some in the crowd which surrounded Jesus and saw the woman, they didn't know that she was dealing with hemorrhages. It was not until she confessed that people knew what was going on with her. The iceberg model helps us to bring to the surface systemic problems that are underneath the water and which many of us do not see.

I have had the good fortune of serving in four congregations and three out of the four do have endowments with which they support their common life. Christ Church doesn't have an endowment to draw from and that in itself challenges our long term sustainability. If we want to be here for another three hundred years, we have to believe that we cannot be afraid, but like Jarius and the woman, we have to move away from inaction necessitated by fear to an action rooted in belief in God.

Over the past several weeks the Vestry and a Task Force have been working to figure out what we can do as a congregation to ensure our long term sustainability. This would involve a lot of work and we want every parishioner to be involved in this conversation. We want to hear from you.

The leadership of the task force will hold series of meetings, 5 in-person at different homes, two online and 2 at the church. We need volunteers to host these meetings. These meetings will help us craft a vision statement which will guide our work. My prayer is that we would all commit ourselves to being a part of this visioning process. We are challenging ourselves to do this work, not because we are afraid, but because we believe in God, and our belief is fueled by a courageous faith in Jesus.

I have been around quite a bit to say that life comes with problems. Nigerians will say “Wahala no dey finish.” Wahala is problems and we never run out of problems. But the question is, who do you think can help with all your wahala? Someone once said that we always talk about how big our problems are but we don’t tell our problems how big our God is. Do not be afraid to tell your problems that you have a very big God. Do not fear, only believe

Ernest Hemingway wrote this “We are all broken ...that’s how the light gets in.” Light doesn’t come into an enclosed area but through broken places. And it is through our problems, the broken places of our lives that we come to discover the extent of God’s love for us, God’s desire to make us whole and to not be crippled with fear but to live courageously.

“Who touched me?” Jesus asked. The woman came forward, no longer worried about the milling crowd or her uncleanness and confessed. She had hoped to leave unnoticed. But her confession freed her soul because wholeness begins with this confession-I need help. I need help. And because I know that Jesus can heal me, Jesus can restore me to wholeness, nothing will stop me from seeking that healing.

Jesus claimed no credit for the healing. He gave her the credit. *Your faith has made you whole.* Not mine, but yours-because you believed.

Remember, it is your faith which can make you whole. And so the burden is on you to be rich only in faith. Fear thrives in places where there is a lack of faith. But where there is abundance of faith, the impossible always happens because we are not cowed by fear, we are driven by possibilities. Do not fear, only believe.

Amen.

