Sermons at Christ Church

Be God's Light That Shines In The darkness.

Pentecost V
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

Today's gospel begins with a story of a helpless man whose daughter was seriously sick and at the point of death. His desire was for the daughter to be made whole. And so like any parent would do, he reached out to Jesus with these words *"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*." Come and make her whole for me. The cry of helpless Jarius reminds me of the words of the psalmist *"Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice; let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.* That was Jarius' prayer and it should be the prayer of any person of faith. Jarius he 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 one man. Upon hearing Jarius' plea from the depth of human helplessness, Jesus listened to the voice of his supplication, made a turn and walked with Jarius to his home. The savior hears us and will walk us home to make us whole, but would we take that first step of faith?

On the way, something strange happened. There was a woman among the crowd who had been dealing with an issue of blood for twelve years. She has seen all the experts. 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 is desperate. You can possibly hear her cry of agony and desperation from the depths in which she found herself. She faces the horror of her illness each morning. She is supposed to be unclean and therefore should not be around other people. But no one in the crowd knows what she is dealing with and so no one can show her any sympathy nor can anyone be her advocate. She is her own advocate.

She sees the crowd and is intimidated by it. She wonders to herself, how can I get this man's attention? I know he can heal me, but considering all the people milling around him, how can I tell him what my problem is?

This was her breakthrough moment, she said to herself, 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 immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Her desire was to be made whole. She knew her moment of wholeness was near, her moment of restoration was now, and so she reached out with faith and touched the clothes of the one man who makes us whole.

She didn't let the crowd be an impediment to her desire for wholeness. She had to take that one step, that step that recognizes obstacles and yet is ready to overcome them in order to be whole.

The disciples didn't understand why Jesus would even complain that someone had touched him. Look at the crowd!! They said. How can you possibly say that someone touched you? But he was the one who had felt power leave him and so was unwilling to let that power go without any acknowledgment.

And when he asked the question, 'who touched me?' the woman came forward and confessed. She knew that to own and confess is life. To deny and disown is death. She had hoped to leave unnoticed. But her confession freed her soul because wholeness begins with a confession. The good news is that Jesus claimed no credit for the healing. He gave her the credit. *Your faith has made you whole.* Not mine, but yours

The empowering part of Jesus' interaction with the woman was the affirmation of her faith. The only way we can be empowered is when our fragile faith is affirmed. When our faith overcomes all obstacles to stay true itself and God, that faith is affirmed. But the affirmation only happens when we take that first step, the step that recognizes obstacles and yet is willing to overcome them in its desire to seek wholeness.

What obstacles do you see standing in your way and hampering your desire to be a person of faith? How can you be made whole? It isn't the case that you are at the cusp of death. No. It isn't the case that you are hemorrhaging blood. No. You and I know that we need to be made whole but we have not as yet taken that first step. That first step that recognizes obstacles and yet with faith is willing to overcome them in its desire to seek wholeness-not for itself alone, but for others as well.

We have been tested over the past several months by the Corona Virus. We have been tested over the years by some of the challenges that our country has faced. The divisions within our society and politics.

The divisions within our homes. The divisions within our churches. Sometimes it feels like our society is like the sick daughter of Jarius lying in bed and on the cusp of death. Sometimes it feels like our society is dead. Sometimes it feels like there is no life or even if there is, there are a good number of us who are like Jarius' daughter-we are dead.

The tragedy is that we sometimes act like the crying crowd near Jarius' home who told Jesus not to bother himself. Don't bother yourself, the girl is already dead. Don't bother yourself the community is dead. Don't bother yourself there is no life at Lake Elkhorn Middle School. Don't bother yourself because there is no value in any new initiative. Don't bother yourself. If the community is dead, why bother to advocate for life? Why bother to make it whole?

But you and I know that our society needs more than healing, it needs restoration. It has to be restored like the woman who had been hemorrhaging blood for twelve years. It has to be given new life like Jarius' daughter. It has to be made whole. The good news is that you and I know the part we can play to make ourselves whole and to advocate for wholeness for others.

In a few days our country will be celebrate its independence anniversary. Our country has come a long way. From the mosquito infested shores of Jamestown to the dreary winter of the pilgrims at Plymouth, our country has come a long way. Imagine the patriots who had to take up arms to defend themselves against a system which subjugated them and took as much from them as possible-they wanted to be whole. Imagine the African American Slave who labored from dawn to dusk under harsh and brutal conditions, and never got paid for all the work. Imagine this man or woman, arguing against the incoherency of slavery and the American Creed that all men and women are created equal-they too wanted to be whole. Imagine the woman who for reasons of being a woman was denied the right to vote. She could do any and all things but was considered inferior to the man, and she didn't possess the capacity to make self-determining decisions-they too wanted to be whole.

Imagine having to hide your sexuality. Imagine being so afraid of even your parents and loved ones that you have to hide who you are, hide your sexuality because of the possible hostility that you could face-our Gay and Lesbian brothers and sisters also wanted to be made whole. Imagine knowing that you couldn't go to certain places or sleep in certain hotels. Imagine knowing you can only live in a particular area because of redlining. Imagine knowing that you cannot drink from certain water fountains or sit on a particular seat on a bus-the freed Slave desired to be whole.

Wholeness doesn't usually come on a silver platter-there is both joy and suffering. Joy carries us but we must carry suffering. We must carry the cross, bearing in mind that wholeness is possible when we take that step, the one step that sees and recognizes obstacles, and yet is willing to interrupt the supposedly usual way of doing things to ensure that there is wholeness in the land.

Remember, it is your faith which can make you whole. And so the burden is on you to be rich in nothing but only in faith. That is the one gift that is acceptable to God and which you can also have in abundance. Are you ready to take that first step of faith-to cry out to God? To reach out from your depth and cry out to God. Wholeness may be yours if you can dare to live in the power of the cross. Amen.