

Stand Up!

The Rev. Karen Millard

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2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

Ezekiel 2:1-7

Mark 5:21-43

Introduction to scripture

Because we were in the midst of it I chose to focus on creation last week but that meant we missed some powerful scriptures that I feel speak well to our context. I have chosen this week therefore to use a mixture of lectionary passages from last week and this.

We will begin with 2 Samuel. In last weeks scripture David is found lamenting the lost of King Saul and his best friend Jonathan who have been killed in battle. In desperation David lashes out in anger and grief killing the bearer of the news. As he grieves the loss of a mighty leader David cries out to God wondering how the nation of Israel will survive.

It is here that we find ourselves in today's scripture seeing God call David out of his brokenness into leadership. This shouldn't surprise us because it seems God often calls people out of the depths to lead. We see it again with the prophet Ezekiel as God calls him to speak to the Judeans in exile. Ezekiel would be content to remain silent, and grieve the loss of the nation but instead he hears out of the darkness "Mortal, stand up on your feet, I will speak with you." God is fully aware of the struggles of David and Ezekiel and the nations they lead, and yet God seems to be saying get up and believe for I am with you.

The gospel of Mark will continue this theme. Jesus has just returned from the other side of the sea having been asked to leave by the gentiles. He was not welcomed in that place likely because his power scarred people. In the new gentile territory Jesus was encountered by a mad-man. When he spoke to the demons within Jesus cast them into a herd of pigs and the pigs plunged into the ocean. The downed pigs were the excuse people used to send Jesus away. Jesus did not let this rejection stop him, instead he wiped the dust off his feet and went back to more familiar territory, preaching and teaching again. And yet we see Jesus teaching in a new way in these stories. Jesus does not seem to be saying a whole lot before the crowds begin to gather. Jesus realizes quickly that these people are recognizing God in their own initiative. Once again we see people who are in the depths open their eyes of faith and say there God is in Jesus.

Let us pray - Holy God as we hear the texts of our faith open our ears, minds and hearts to recognize you with us in a new way this day.

Imagine sitting around one day with a group of friends and colleagues lamenting the loss of the good old days, desperate for the time when children played in the streets and filled the pews, remembering when you could afford to buy a house and a car and a boat for the weekends, pondering the days when people treated one another with respect and cared about their community, lamenting the corruption of the government, and the systems that seem to fail to assist anyone anymore and suddenly you hear a voice out of the darkness call to you

“Mortal Stand UP!” You’re going to say something for me.
I am pretty sure I’d find the closest item I could to hide under and like Ezekiel I’d need the spirit to set me on my feet because I wouldn’t be moving on my own.

John Holbert warns us to be careful with passages like these because they can encourage us to do one of two things they can offer us strength and conviction to speak truth or they can offer us too much certainty to speak out of our arrogance and selfish pride. That is why it is essential to look at how the prophet enters into this ministry. Ezekiel, on his own has nothing to say.

That is why his call story is filled with dramatic movement of the spirit that goes on for a few chapters. “Ezekiel was called to his prophetic ministry during the greatest crisis in the nation’s history. In 597 BCE, the Babylonians had come to the city of Jerusalem, bent on conquest. They had defeated the ... armies of the nation and had made Israel a vassal, placing ... Zedekiah, on the throne.”¹ Zedekiah ended up destroying Jerusalem and Israel ceased to exist as a nation.

It is into this context God calls upon Ezekiel to speak. “Mortal, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you!” But Ezekiel understandably cannot stand on his own the spirit enters him and lifts him up implying that everything that happens or is spoken from here on in is “The word of the Lord.”

Nest, as always God says to Ezekiel “Don’t be afraid” it will be me speaking not you. It’s not about you, it’s about me. The message God has for Ezekiel to give is not easy. He asks the prophet to call people to repent of their despair and lack of trust, that they might see God at work. Ezekiel is not sure he is up to it, but when the spirit moves someone to speak truth it is usually not a benefit to resist. And so God assures Ezekiel that if they like it or not they will hear the voice of God. And so out of the despair and humility of Ezekiel God speaks a message truth that leads to the hope and restoration of the people of Israel.

¹ John Holbert, workingpreacher.org, July 5, 2009 (professor of Homiletics Perkins School of Theology)

This reminds me of a couple of weeks ago when we spoke of God with us in the storms of life. How the scripture of Jesus calming the sea was more about how Jesus was with the disciples in the storm than it was about the storm being calmed itself. We were reminded that metaphorically the storms the disciples were facing were the fear and the anxiety of being with this Jesus and the mission he was calling them to. They were taking significant risks by opening themselves up to Jesus and being lead to reach out to the Gentiles and the outcasts. Crossing the sea for the early Christians would have carried images of the demons of tension, doubt, and fear. But Jesus wanted the disciples to live as if they believed God was with them, that even in the midst of the storm they were not alone.

“Peace be still, Be not afraid”

What happens when we take notice of The Holy with us in the journey?

What happens when we stop and listen, take notice and allow the spirit to move us in such a way that we recognize God speaking? What would it look like for us to see God at work even when we are in the depths? Would it lead us to reach out?

That had to be what happened for Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman there had to be some faith in the midst of their desperation because neither one of them had a right to be there, reaching out to this traveling preacher in the midst of the crowd. Neither one of them should have been in that crowd at that time following Jesus. Both of them had to choose between living in faith or fear. Both of them had to choose hope over despair.

Jairus shouldn't have been there because he was a part of the crowd of religious leaders that were rejecting Jesus. He was a man of prestige who was accustomed to being listed too. He wouldn't have wanted his colleges to know he was going to this Jesus. But the illness of his daughter had brought him to a desperate moment. Now there is something spirit filled and precious about Jairus because not only was he going after someone for assistance he shouldn't have been, he was reaching out to Jesus for an unusual reason. You see, daughters would have been considered dispensable in his day so that fact that he was risking his very reputation for this child was significant. Perhaps that is why the name Jairus is chosen for this man for his name means “he who will be awakened or enlightened.”

Now not only should Jairus not have been seeking out Jesus, the hemorrhaging woman shouldn't have been in the crowd either for she would have been considered unclean. She was not to be with people in her state. But she knew she had to risk persecution to be near this Jesus. She knew she had to choose life over death, hope over despair.

Both were reaching out for new life, acknowledging the presence of God out of their despair. It is no coincidence that the woman has been bleeding for 12 years and the daughter of Jairus is twelve years old. For the number of 12 in scripture refers to God's order or completion. For both I see this represent new life, resurrection.

Even today twelve years of bleeding would cause a woman to be weak and tired. In that day I think it would have meant she was weak and tired and done – she couldn't have had a whole lot of fight left. She would have been desperate having seen all the physicians she could, who had robbed her blind, and left her sicker she had nothing left and not only was she not healed she would have been isolated, and rejected. She would have not been able to carry on relationships, or be a part of the community because she was unclean. She couldn't have even attended worship, or family events.

She shouldn't have been anywhere near Jesus and she knew that so she thought she'd just touch him hoping, dreaming, wishing his healing spirit would somehow rub off. And it did. But Jesus isn't just about physical healing he is about abundant life. He's about showing us who God is and so he took this opportunity to face injustice head on.

And so when he feels her touch, Jesus stops. Even though he is on his way to the daughter of a very important man Jesus stops, for this unknown, unclean woman and he acknowledges her presence. You see what is held as most important for humankind, and what is held as most important for God are rarely the same. God is not bound or limited by our restrictions. So Jesus stops and lives out the question we asked last Sunday. What within my reach that needs God's mending and he offers the grace to heal it.

In doing that this woman saw restoration and healing of her whole-self. By Jesus' acknowledgment and recognition she likely would have been restored within her family, her faith community, and her entire town. By Jesus allowing her to touch him he broke down the injustice of separation, and ridicule. He faced unjust taboos head on and she was restored. And so he calls her to life. Jesus says to her "Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague." Physical healing is not the end, fullness of life is. Risk-life, truth, faith and you will be whole.

But it's about this time that some of the people from Jairus' home come and say "It's too late, she has died." I am sure a buzz hit the crowd because perhaps if Jesus hadn't stopped and wasted his time with this no-named woman Jairus' daughter would have lived. Jairus must have really begun to despair. Kate Huey writes "By going to this itinerant preacher-healer who was already in trouble with the authorities (authorities like him, in fact, his colleagues and perhaps even his friends). He risks being ridiculed, and he risks missing the last few precious moments in his daughter's life."²

And so frustrated his family and friends find Jairus and say come home – stop bothering the teacher, it's too late. But Jesus speaks into Jairus' despair and says "Do not fear, only believe."

² Huey Kate, Healing Powers Jun 22-28 by iucc textweek.com

“Do not fear, only believe.” Jesus in that moment speaks to all of us who despair of all our human conditions that we cannot control. He walks into the despair, the grieving, and the supposedly dead and calls out new life. He reaches out and touches that which he should not touch, that which was considered unclean, dead, and lifeless and offers abundant restoration.

This passage has forced me to ask— what are the places in my life that I consider untouchable? Un reachable? Incapable of healing? Or dead? Do we believe our God can touch those places? Do we have the faith of this woman, or Jairus to reach out and ask? Are we willing to risk exposure of our humanity that we may have fullness of life?

Each of these stories made me think of the place we are in as a community of faith. I have only just begun my time here, and I know new things will emerge but some of the real questions and wonderings I have heard are what does God have for us, we might even ask what about us dying? We do ask where are the children, where is the money? I see this community of faith wrestling the way many communities of faith are wrestling. And yet I also am feeling the spirit alive in this place, I am hearing some people offering words of risk, and faith and belief. I am watching people live the spirit welcome even when it means risking having others question them.

I have come to discover there are people here who are feeling a whole lot more like Ezekiel than they would like to. People are being lead to speak into a new way of being in a community that is not sure they fully understand the direction. And to those of you I would say always listen to the spirit and be aware of the difference between our agenda and Gods. I think we often have that a lot more clear than we think we do. And from what I have seen that is what you are doing so continue in your faithful pursuit. Now, I have also discovered there are those who like Jairus are willing to risk saying every child, and person is important even if maybe some think I shouldn't be working so hard to find a place and life for them. That is the spirit's call.

I see people in this place like the hemorrhaging woman who are tired and yet they know they have to reach out in faith, trusting that it will bring about restoration. People choosing life over death, hope over despair.

And I see those who like David are lamenting the loss of what has been, but are now being called to be a part of something new. It's not always easy but hear the words of Christ “Don't be afraid, only believe.”

From David, to Ezekiel, to Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman some things are consistent – God is at work and when people take notice and reach out in faith lives are transformed. Our faith is about trusting in God not ourselves. Mark wrote these stories down that we might see God at work, for all people.

Jesus reminds us that God does not see certain ones of us as more prestigious and more worthy of healing. Jesus refuses to keep himself removed from those who are declared

unclean. And Jesus calls us to the same. Buechner says Jesus speaks to us, taking our hand and tells us to rise up and live: “You who believe, and you who sometimes believe and sometimes don’t believe much of anything, and you who would give almost anything to believe if only you could...’Get up,’ he says, all of you – all of you” God gives life not only to the dead, but to those of us who are ‘only partly alive...who much of the time live with our lives closed to the wild beauty and the miracle of things, including the wild beauty and miracle of every day we live...That Buechner says is the power at the heart of the story and all of our stories ‘the power of new life, new hope, new being.’ Whether we take notice or not, miracles happen around us every day, and God will continue to work.”³ The opportunity we have is to hear the spirit say to us “Mortal stand UP!” and allow the spirit to jolt us into a new way of being that all the world will be blessed by that spirit presence that flows out of us. “Don’t be afraid, only believe.”

May we know that kind of abundant life healing. Amen

³ IBID