

Message: 9:18-26: Three Healings II: Marginalized

Introduction:

Today's passage links back to some of those healings recently that we saw as we walk through Matthew, that Jesus did among those who were on the outside, the fringe, of his society: Lepers, Romans, some demon-possessed men. And in the passage we read today, Jesus heals two daughters: A younger one and an older one.

In between these two scenes we saw Jesus' authority proven as he forgave the sins of the paralyzed man, and we were challenged last Sunday to consider just what Jesus does with this authority: He goes to those who don't expect him, rather than those who do, because, as he puts it, "It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick," and I invited us to consider who we'd rather not go to, because we believe we're just so different from them, and yet, from the smallest distance in the dark we'd appear exactly the same.

But questions about Jesus' authority and his going to people are wrapped by these scenes of miraculously healing people who you wouldn't expect him to spend much time paying attention to. We expect it, because we're deep into following Jesus. But those who were actually waiting for God wouldn't have expected it.

Today's passage is well known, whether it's Mark's or Luke's version of it. It could seem like old, except that God's mercies are new every morning, every day has its own troubles, and we ourselves come to Scripture as growing, changing people, every time we come to it. My hope is that we are challenged in a new way by this passage if we've heard it before, and if we haven't, that we discover something about God and ourselves in what we hear. So. Let's pray for that.

Prayer:

Introduction: Situation:

It's late evening. Jesus has just pointed out how what he's doing is totally appropriate, given who he is, and that the religious leaders ought to recognize this. Matthew's private patio has turned into a public forum. First Pharisees, then more boldly John's Disciples speak up.

And now, a synagogue leader, who doesn't wait for Jesus to finish his conversation about what's appropriate for a person of God to do, he just butts in.

Luke, in general, gives us so much more detail than Matthew, and does so with today's scene, too. Luke tells us the synagogue leader's name--Jairus--and that his daughter is only twelve. That's interesting stuff; Matthew leaves it out.

Introduction: Framework

Let me point out the framework of today's passage. It's a simple framework, a simple structure. But if you've ever tried to hang a picture, you know how important the structure we never notice can be, and I want us, when we're done talking about today's passage, to hang something--a new habit, a hope for ourselves, a deeper understanding of God's love for us--on this bit of Bible.

So. Structure matters. Here:

Daughter's Need Revealed ***A Different "Daughter" Healed*** ***First Daughter Healed***

Straightforward right? We really see two "daughters," in today's passage. The synagogue leader's daughter, whom he clearly loves and loves, then as Jesus goes on his way he interacts with a second woman, a nameless woman whom Jesus calls--oddly, but pointedly-- "daughter," and then we return to that first daughter's need.

And the fact that this whole scene is framed around these "daughters" points out, again, the way Jesus really does care deeply about those society doesn't care about. Matthew is written for a Jewish audience, undoubtedly, but it doesn't negate Jesus' basic posture of attention, encouragement, and love for those who

just aren't worth much as far as society values things.

A young daughter was often a financial obligation more than a person; her father's interruption and even affection was something...not shameful, per se, but unusual, weird. A woman who suffered from vaginal bleeding was ceremonially, religiously unclean, untouchable. She shouldn't have been in the crowd. If the leper and the centurion who came to Jesus for help earlier were way outside, then these are, like the tax collectors, insider outsiders, does that make sense? They are nobodies inside the system, and for Jesus to pay attention to the nobodies inside the system, not the ones who are so out-of-bounds that they are barely people, it's a dramatic thing to do.

First Daughter:

So the Synagogue Leader comes to Jesus, boldly interrupts as Jesus teaches about God--something that he'd be really, really frustrated about, given how often he teaches people. This father isn't without resource or influence or favors-to-cash-in in the world. He's a synagogue leader. He's a person of influence and leadership, someone people take their cues from, whose lives are shaped by his wisdom and help.

But he is without wisdom and help, now, and his cues are coming from the masses of people who want to see Jesus, who's doing amazing things. He hopes for amazing things.

He's likely a Pharisee himself, a protector of Israel's popular faithfulness, maybe he passed some of his colleagues, some of those who attend the synagogue at Capernaum, as they just left Matthew's place thinking about Jesus' words. The Synagogue Leader is the establishment, and the establishment doesn't generally take kindly to these pop-religious teachers, like Jesus seemed to be. We've seen that again and again.

Desperation drops us to our knees no matter how many resources we have, and good parents will do anything to help their kids, even if it means they lose everything, too--and the Synagogue leader was risking this when he showed up bowing down to a miracle worker, when he presented himself desperate in public, when he did all this for a daughter who wasn't valued by society, and did it in front of the people who took their cues from him, who would, when the sun comes up the next morning, challenge him and maybe remove him from his position of power, influence, and authority. He gives up all his authority for Jesus' authority, gives up on helping himself to ask Jesus to help him. And whether or not Jesus does, what he's doing now is going to ruin his career, his reputation, and the future of whoever is still alive in his family.

But his daughter has died, right?

18 While he was saying this, a synagogue leader

came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” 19 Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

Second Daughter:

And it's hard going, because Jesus never travels alone. His disciples are with him, and we assume John's Disciples have followed along, the guests at Matthew's house who are sober enough to go, whoever else was standing off the patio, or is attracted to a crowd.

And a woman is there. She's been menstruating for 12 years. Twelve years! Luke, with his poetry, points out that the Synagogue Leader's daughter was also twelve. Matthew leaves that out, but God must know that the day or week or month this first daughter was born, this second daughter, this nameless woman, started bleeding. W

She's weak, probably, and worse. You've heard before how isolating this would have been. It would have isolated her from her husband, if she were married. It would have kept her from her family even if she wasn't. She was, frankly, “unclean.” Hygiene wasn't what is is, now, and if there wasn't an odor about her, she would have been heavily perfumed at least. She was likely unused to going out in public, where she wasn't really supposed to be.

And God's good Law, that thing that was meant to bind Israel together so that they might be a witness in the world to God, it became a thing that, in our broken world, isolates people, isolated this woman.

No one could heal her. She may or may not have spent all she had on doctors; but she spent a lot. And she worms her way through whoever is around, uncaring that each time she touches one of them they're unclean. They don't know it, of course, unless there are a few of them who recognize her...but remember, we're in Jesus' small hometown. She was recognized, certainly. Certainty. But it's dark, after dinner, and maybe most people didn't recognize her at the time. But we know that this woman is passing uncleanness throughout the crowd, as she pushes between other sinners, and Pharisees, and tax collectors, and all sorts of people who gather around Jesus and think bad thoughts about each other.

And again, we see, that there's something--I don't know. Incomplete? Insufficient?--in this system of rules that make people insiders and outsiders. At the center of this crowd isn't just Jesus, it's the hope of a new way of being holy, one that doesn't have to keep track of the thousands of small touches we have with people every day, one that allows for us to freely touch and be touched and befriend one another, without worrying about catching, like we catch a cold, sin and things like sin.

The daughter has hatched a plan.

20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. 21 She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

But when this woman touches Jesus--barely touches Jesus, gets a hand on his cloak for a second, Jesus doesn't catch her uncleanness, doesn't become untouchable, instead it works the other way around: she is cleaned.

22 Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment.

Jesus doesn't just break the rules, he unmakes them. He doesn't become unclean at her touch; instead he cleans her up. "That moment" could be the moment Jesus speaks; Luke presents it as the moment the daughter touched Jesus' cloak. But the point, either way, is that this woman got it. She got who Jesus was, got somehow the power that was at work in him, power to heal, to clean, to reincorporate her into the world, instead of being sidelined by it. The plan she made was based on trust, on faith, that God would do in Jesus what she believed God could do.

The same way uncleanness radiates out of the unclean, and everyone around them catches it, Jesus' power to heal radiates out of him, only much more so, so much more so that it undoes the uncleanness of wherever Jesus goes. No wonder Jesus needed to go to the sinners, to the unhealthy, to the outsiders, to the ones who needed to catch what he had.

And Jesus leaves the daughter with a blessing.

“Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.”

First of all, this is beautiful. What would it be like if every time someone got in touch with us, came in contact with us, they experienced God's good things, and we left them with a blessing. But, more personally, this woman needed to “take heart.” She knew she had done a bad thing, a wrong thing, going out, risking making everyone around her unclean, risking her future in the village, risking her hope, because what if her trust turned out to be baseless, and Jesus condemned her just like the Synagogue's Ruler would have necessarily condemned her. She needs to be told by her healer to “take heart.” And I bet she did, I bet she left not just renewed physically, but in every way.

Jesus, metaphorically, brings this daughter back to life.

First Daughter:

But the Synagogue Ruler is still there, is right there, right? He's hoping--and this is ridiculous--that Jesus will raise his own daughter from the dead. Not metaphorically, like the second daughter was when she was given a new "lease on life."

He wants Jesus to give life back to his daughter. And he hears Jesus say to this woman who is taking up valuable time, "Daughter, your faith has saved you."--the word's the same, despite how we translate it, saved, healed, same thing: "Daughter, your faith has saved you."

For the dad who is trying to get Jesus to his house to bring his own daughter back to life, this phrase must have been something like a punch in the gut. A chance for hopelessness and grief. And yet Jesus doesn't toss words out willy-nilly. He unusually chose to say this to the woman he just healed, instead of addressing her as "woman," as he does here and there.

I don't know why Jesus says this. Maybe he's saying daughter as he glances at the dad just to communicate that he hasn't forgotten where they're going. Maybe he's saying it to offer the dad a chance to believe some more, pray some more, hope some more.

They get to the synagogue leader's house, and

mourning has already started. The pre-funeral stuff is in play. People are grieving the death of their synagogue leader's daughter. People are loud and wailing, because people knew how to grieve, then. There are musicians playing funeral music.

“Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.” Jesus says, “But they laughed at him.”

Jesus tells them she's only asleep, and to stop crying. But they laugh at him; the word means to ridicule to scorn to scoff. They blow Jesus off, derisively .

But if Jesus' dismissal is in public, the daughter's healing happens in private.

25 After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. 26 News of this spread through all that region.

Luke, as he does, gives us more detail here: they eat, the parents are amazed. Matthew just gives us the note that this act, this thing, the news of it spreads. The word gets out. And it clears the way for Jesus and his disciples to come after it, talking and teaching and doing all that God was expected to do.

So. So, what?

Noticing: Christ of Last Resort

We should notice that Synagogue Leader shouldn't come to Jesus; it makes no sense, given his station in life. And he shouldn't leave his daughter's funeral party, much less kick everyone out of his home, to seek out a ridiculous miracle. A ridiculous hope. But he does these things because he has nowhere else to go. Neither does the woman called "daughter," who has tried everything to be healed, and has nothing to show for it.

The Synagogue Leader's daughter is dead, and she may as well be.

We shouldn't quickly disregard coming to Jesus as a last resort, because Jesus doesn't seem to disregard it all that much. And we get this, a little: Most of us know that it's usually when we are most desperate that we turn to the Lord, and most of us have stories or know of those who do who have found Jesus healing, his saving, in this moments.

But this is funny, because most of us tend be a little dismissive if we find ourselves in Jesus' shoes. People come to us for help and we ask why they didn't ask us earlier. We tell them "I told you so," or feel it--and behind "I told you so" is an attitude of hurt, of rejection. We begrudge the space between their need and their turn toward us, and feel put-upon "I've been here, waiting or trying to help, and now you come to

me? And now you expect me to meet your needs?"

Jesus isn't like us in this way, and it's a good thing and it's something we should mimic if we can. He doesn't feel hurt when we don't turn to him immediately, and he doesn't feel hurt when we don't take our advice. His only wish is that we would have turned to him sooner, so he might have helped us sooner, and who can argue with that? There's no disappointment there--just a longing to love us.

We should turn to Christ as soon as we're able; as soon as we find ourselves needy. We are God's children, who God really loves, in whom God takes great pleasure. We are privileged citizens of the Kingdom of God, with rights and privileges of citizenship that we ignore too often.

But if, out of fear or forgetfulness, we don't turn to Jesus until it seems almost too late, he'll do what he can for us. And like Jesus, we should be ready to meet people's needs even if they have waited for what seems like too long, even if we wish that they had asked us for help sooner than they have.

There are questions we should ask ourselves that follow from this: Are we withholding help from someone because we're hurt or because they didn't ask us on our timeline? Have we, out of fear or forgetfulness, forgotten to beg for Jesus' help in

whatever great need is knocking us around?

Noticing: Insiders & Outsiders

Some of us, in most of the places where we spend our time, are insiders. We're known. We're popular. We're well-connected. Some of us, in most of the places we spend our time, are outsiders--we're not go-to people, we're not well networked. Our name isn't well known and we're unseen more than seen.

And we are all outsiders or insiders in various places, right? Nearly everyone is popular somewhere; where you go I might be ignored, and vice-versa.

But we should notice that the Synagogue Leader and the older Daughter both go to Jesus. The Synagogue Leader is the ideal insider: a spiritual and community leader, well-networked, influential and a resource for people. She is untouchable and isolated.

But they both fall at Jesus' feet, and they both find their great pressing need met by him. Jesus meets the needs of insiders and outsiders.

So, in most places, do you feel like an insider or do you feel like an outsider? Because however you perceive yourself, Jesus wants to meet your needs. And whatever you think about others--those you work with, play with, be the Church with--Jesus is going to meet their needs, too, if they can just fall at his feet and ask

him too, draw close to him and risk a touch.

How can we help ourselves--that insider or outsider we are--to get close to Jesus? How can we help “the other,” those people who we just don’t think are like us, more or less popular, better or worse connected--to get to him?

Noticing: Religious Correctness

And we should notice that this woman is an outsider, in part, because of the very Law that this Synagogue ruler helps promote and teach. This woman is an outsider, in part, because of the very Law that this Synagogue ruler helps promote and teach. They are social opposites, and have experienced Israelite faithfulness in very, very different ways; one benefiting from it, another not at all, her life made incredibly difficult because of it.

Jesus meets needs for both people who benefit from and people who are isolated by what we believe God cares most about.

What I mean is this: We have probably all experienced some loss, some hurt, because of some religious idea--an idea about what God really cares about most. Christians are very, very good at disagreeing--because when we disagree it’s about the most important things there are, right?-- and when you take the thousands and thousands of words that the Bible has, it becomes

very easy to lob them at each other and at people.

Some of us know all the right moves in all the right places; we're never going down. We know how to believe, how to behave, how to serve: we know the "right"--or at least the "best" way of being Christian, following God as He's revealed himself.

But there are no favorites. Whether we've benefited from being a religious insider, from knowing how to play by our denomination's, or small group's, or generation's Christian rules, or whether, not quite fitting into those rules, we have found ourselves stuck on the outside--Jesus still loves us.

Jesus wants to meet our needs. And more than this, he wants to meet the needs of those who are unlike us--the outsiders who don't dress in the right Christian trappings, the insiders with their straight gig lines. Jesus draws us all to himself, no matter which camp we've spent more time in.

I like to think that maybe down the line the first daughter's family had the second daughter's family over for dinner. They talked about God and what they'd learned of him. They drank some wine and played some ancient Israelite game, like, Scrabble. They were a witness of how dramatically being saved and healed by Jesus can erase the divisions.

Whether Church is comfortable like our favorite jeans or scratchy like that one sweater, we're called to it. How well are we doing at helping people turn to Jesus so he can meet their needs, whether or not they know how to believe, behave, serve the "right" way or whether they don't? What do we need to know about ourselves in order to answer that question well?

There are so many more things we could draw from this passage that aren't necessarily written across its surface. I am sure in our effort to get to Jesus, to have our needs met and heard and cared about, we have steamrolled other Christians and their worries, like the way this nameless daughter dove into the mob and made everyone she touched unclean in her own efforts to get close to Jesus. Great need can't be an excuse for thoughtlessness.

We could ask where people are crowded around, waiting for the Lord to reveal himself, and how we, as a community, as the Church, could go there and be his revelation. All we'd have to do is think about where people with great needs gather. How can we meet the needs, heal, those folk? I'm sure Jesus wants us to.

Conclusion:

We've heard today's passage so many times; some version of it is in Matthew, Mark, Luke. I don't doubt it's a little stale for some of us, old newsy. But we have to let it impact us. We're different people than we

were the last time we heard it: outsider or insider, grudge-holder or grace-giver, churchy or not that churchy. Sometimes we're the synagogue leader, sometimes we're the "daughter" Jesus sends off with a "take heart."

I pray that we're often Jesus himself, sending people off saved, healed, taking heart.