

Sermon Preached on June 27, 2021 – Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

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St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Yarmouth, ME 04096

The Book of Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24

Psalms 30

Mark 5:21-43

Words of Ludwig Wittgenstein: *The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. One is unable to notice something because it is always right before our eyes.*

After twenty-five years of parish ministry, I can count on one hand the times God has spoken to me. These are words of a conservative evangelical pastor who sought me out for council. He was worn-out from waiting for God to speak, frustrated that God hadn't been more direct with him over the years. He felt guilty about voicing his weariness and irritation. Nevertheless, he pressed on with his complaint. He insisted that he had given God his best and God hardly had given him the time of day. He wondered what clean living and the creation of a thriving congregation had gotten him other than migraine headaches.

As the minister and I continued to meet, I sensed something about why his need for God's attention might be important. He was the oldest of seven sons in a blue-collar family. His father worked night and day to make ends meet. The best and most he got from dad usually was a stern and preoccupied presence at supper.

I mentioned that his image of God's inattention might be colored by him and his father's relation: a man too busy to pay much attention to a son who needed it. I suggested that he spend time praying to God less as a seventh child, more as an only child. He said that he would work at it, but that it sounded selfish.

There's enough of this pastor in me to understand his hesitancy regarding my suggestion. The world, especially the world cyphered through social media, is a mess, in need of all the God it can get. Who was I, last Thanksgiving Day, to ask God to attend to my despair at not being able to be at my dying mother's bedside, she in a quarantined assisted living center in Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina?

Reason suggests God could not possibly have special time for me, even for a moment. God too busy with Covid in Peru to slow down enough for me to at least offer a quick gratitude for the hospice nurse, who put the phone to my mother's ear for me to say goodbye. Wasn't my summons for God's attention like flagging down a speeding fire truck to ask directions to *Maine Beer Company*?

The dizziness of today's gospel suggests that flagging down an overworked God is not out of order.

Jesus is on an impressive and irreligious jaunt, back and forth across the Sea of Galilee, miraculously healing *unfit* Gentiles on one side and *unclean* Jews on the other. On the Jewish side of the sea, Jesus encountered Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. Jairus begged Jesus to follow him home to save his sick daughter who was at the point of death. Jesus immediately left with Jairus. A smothering crowd of spectators followed along, anxious for a firsthand witness of what was to happen next.

Along the way, a woman fought through the suffocating crowd and touched Jesus's cloak, thinking that if she did, she could be cured of a long-term illness. Jesus asked who touched him. The woman confessed. I take her confession to be less a sin of contaminating Jesus with her blood disease and more an offering of her lived experience, as if she knew by heart verse 17 of Psalm 51: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Listen to the disciples' reaction: "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched you?'" They were amazed that Jesus could feel the sensation of a single touch in such a stifling flock of people. They were also probably more than a little annoyed that Jesus would stop, at such an inopportune time, to remedy a ritually dirty woman's chronic disease and then hang around to talk with her. Didn't their master realize that an acutely ill, if not dead, child of an important man was eager for a far greater miracle?

The God of earth and all stars, with one mess of a cosmos to fix, remains ultra-sensitive to each of our touches. Through the thick and encircling mass of desperate people in grave situations, God still feels our touch. The heart of God has time for us. The heart of God readily clears a couple of hours on Wednesday afternoon to watch us play softball, whether we win or lose, whether it's a play-off game or not.

How does the heart of God steward her time so efficiently? A better question might be: How might we conjure at least a hunch of the heart of God's cosmic availability?

For me, the conjuring begins with the nature of the heart of God. The heart of God is love. Love is the heart of God. God and love synonymous. Period.

I fear we have domesticated God, house-trained love into a fixed commodity like oil, for instance. How much love do we have left? How much God is there to go around?

In other words, a spirituality of scarcity. A spirituality of scarcity suggests that God is apportioned according to need. The Middle East, a cookie cutter term we created to help us snatch a greater share of limited oil, certainly needs more love than me and my middle-class laments and anxieties. Per my evangelical friend with the migraines, there are *at least* six brothers ahead of me.

The nature of love, the core of the heart of God, stands down a spirituality of scarcity with a spirituality of abundance. Love begets love. To ration love, we simply love more. How about that for a divine reversal?

Bill, do you mean that calling on God to hear your cry for a mother dying without family at the bedside, thanking God for the hospice nurse, moves creation closer to fulfillment? Or, more specifically, Bill, did such prayer loosen more love for the race problem in our country, more love for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, more love for Maine's 2nd district, our state's underbelly? Yes.

And how about this: In today's gospel, did the desperate woman's reach for the cloak of Jesus, and Jesus's mind-blowing sensitivity to her touch, create more and greater love for Jairus and his dying daughter?

I like to think it did.

Friends let's trust that the heart of God feels our slightest touch. Let's trust that reaching for the cloak of Jesus raises the water table of love.

Amen.