

2024 Proper 8B

Jesus has been spending a fair amount of time on or near the Sea of Galilee in these chapters of Mark. Last week you heard that he convinced his disciples to take him across, then slept through a fierce storm that arose. The disciples chastised him, “Don’t you care that we are perishing?!” and he clapped back that they were being cowardly, and needed more faith. Today we heard that he came back across—apparently the trip was uneventful. In between is that weird, a little bit creepy, story of Jesus healing the Gerasene demoniac. (I am a little disappointed that the lectionary skips over that story in Mark—it’s a fun one to preach!) He has proven that he has the power to tame chaos.

I don’t know about all of you, but I would welcome *that* Jesus into the national narrative right now!

In today’s reading, we see how Jesus deals with another kind of chaos.

I’ll confess, the image of Jesus trying to move forward in the midst of mob makes me very anxious. I don’t like crowds—that’s why I don’t run for General Convention Deputy. I’d love to be part of the work, but the crowds, man. I couldn’t handle the crowds.

Crowds are unpredictable. They can be dangerous. There's no clear path to safety. They are loud. And ever since COVID-19 appeared in the story, there's always the chance that there is some unknown pathogen lurking in someone's lungs, just waiting to be coughed out right into my face.

No, crowds are not for me.

I don't really think Jesus enjoyed the crowds himself. They just came with the job. If you are going to be a chaos-calming, demon-exorcising, illness-healing, death-defeating, good-news-preaching kind of guy...it's going to attract attention. People are going to seek you out for help.

Some publicly. Some privately, even secretly.

This story of two healings are found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—and in all three they are woven together into one story. Those two healings are connected.

It's not just the obvious link: the daughter was twelve years old and the woman had been bleeding for twelve years. I don't think that's coincidence, but it's not the main point of the story. But that detail draws us in, makes us stop and think.

If the woman has been continuously bleeding for twelve years, she is probably seriously anemic. It's a wonder she can walk at all. It's a wonder she's even alive.

She has been suffering for the entire length of the child's life.

I have always believed that this is a story of a woman who has spent all those years separated from the touch of another human being, and I still lean that way. It's a continuation of the previous story of how Jesus restores people to community, to relationship with one another.

But...she was where she could hear about the wonderworker in town...and she put herself in that crush of people, and reached out to touch Jesus's cloak...What is if this is a story of a woman who has been carrying a horrible secret, choosing to lie in order to remain in relationship with other people? What if this is a story of a woman carrying immense guilt because she thinks she's been spreading contamination throughout her community by not obeying religious law?

Either way, in this moment, she's counting on a stealth healing. Touch his cloak, get healed, fade back into the crowd. No one will ever have to know.

But Jesus has other plans.

“Who touched me?” he asks.

I am right there with the disciples on this one. What do you mean, who touched you? Who *didn't* touch you, Jesus?

To be fair, Jesus has information they don't. He felt some power 'leave' him. He knew something had happened. He wanted the truth to come out into the open. No more secrets.

And here is where we see the difference between curing and healing. The woman's audacity led to her cure—the bleeding stopped. But her humility led to her healing. When Jesus demanded the truth, she stepped forward and admitted what she had done.

Probably expecting a very public shaming, at the very least.

But Jesus isn't into shaming people.

Instead, he praises her for her faith and very publicly declares that she has been healed and tells her to go in peace. Let go of whatever has weighed her down all these years.

Then the twist. Jesus took too long, distracted by this woman and her problem. The girl is dead.

You didn't show up in time, Jesus. It's too late now.
Sorry to have bothered you.

It is only now that Jesus puts his foot down, and tells the crowd to stay back. He takes just Peter, James and John with him as he continues on to the Jairus' house, where he heals the child, raises her from the dead, and then tells those who witness it to keep it a secret. Don't tell.

Ummm, Jesus? The child was dead and is now alive.
Don't you think there are going to be questions?!

We talked a little bit about this on Wednesday. Why, if we are supposed to go and share the good news, does Jesus tell them *not* to say anything?

That's a question so big it has its own category in Biblical studies; it's called The Messianic Secret. I'll be honest, I'm not sure anyone has ever come up with a fully satisfying answer. I take it as Jesus trying to control the narrative about himself while he walked this earth, prior to the Crucifixion and Resurrection. It wasn't an eternal ban on telling. Just a request to wait until the time was right. Until people could see that these miracles were part of the evidence that he is the Son of God, the Messiah—but not the kind of Messiah they thought they wanted. He was asking them to hold off saying anything until people were ready to accept this new vision of the Kingdom of God.

Before I finish up, I have to share one more thing that came out of Wednesday's Bible Study. As we were wrestling with this question of why Jesus tells people not to say anything, someone asked a question that I had never considered before. (They were on fire on Wednesday—I had to take notes!)

She asked, "What about all the stories that were lost because people obeyed Jesus and never said a word about how he healed them?"

I have been carrying that question around in my head since then. What stories remained secret? What stories are lost because nobody got the memo that the Resurrection lifted the ban?

What stories of healing and restoration remain locked away in *your* hearts and minds and souls?

And who needs to hear them, so that they, too, can be healed and restored and set free?

Amen.