

“Keep On Believing”
Sermon Series on *The King and His Kingdom*
Dr. Peter B. Barnes
First Presbyterian Church, Winston-Salem
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(Mt. 9:18-26)

Introduction.

Last week I made a quick survey of the events of the last few weeks that have happened in this country and also around the world, and I came away with a very heavy heart. I was burdened by all the tragedy and loss and the pain of this fall.

- Hurricane Maria whipped Puerto Rico with strong winds and drenching rain that resulted in massive flooding. It crippled communications, decimated buildings and damaged a dam that puts downstream residents at risk of catastrophe. 1 million people were without power for a long period of time, and the island is still recovering.
- Eight people were killed and almost a dozen injured when a 29-year-old man drove a rented pickup truck down a busy bicycle path near the World Trade Center in New York City.
- And 26 people were killed at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, east of San Antonio. The congregation was gathered together for Sunday worship when the madness happened. The shooter fled and was pursued by a resident and police, but he was found dead after running his car off the road.

When a crisis hits, when you're at the end of your rope, how do you cope? What do you do? Where do you turn?

All of us experience disappointments and setbacks from time to time. Maybe it's not a hurricane or a senseless killing, but we all have crises during various seasons of our lives. These experiences can be so discouraging to us, they bring us to our knees, and sometimes they stretch us to the limit of what we think we can endure. Maybe you're in a season like that right now.

This morning we read of two people who were in the midst of their own crisis. They are a man who was a religious leader, and a woman who suffered from a physical ailment. What did they have in common, and what can we learn from their lives which may help us deal more effectively with our own crises and setbacks?

I. A Prominent Leader.

You'll recall from my sermon a few weeks ago on Matthew that Jesus was asked by the townspeople in the region of Gadarenes to leave that area because they didn't like the way He disrupted their lives. (Have you ever noticed that Jesus has a way of disrupting your life?) As a result of the reaction of the Gadarenes Jesus and His disciples traveled to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, probably returning to the town of Capernaum. There Jesus encountered a large crowd, and in particular he met a man who was in great distress. Here's what we know about him.

First, the text tells us **he was the ruler**, but it doesn't say anything more. However, we learn from Mark's Gospel that he was the ruler of the synagogue, and his name was Jairus. Being the ruler of the synagogue meant that he was a layperson who was the administrative head of the congregation. He was also the president of the board of elders, and he was responsible for organizing the worship services, although he himself wasn't the worship leader. In addition, the ruler of the synagogue was one of the most important and respected people in the Jewish community. Today the job would be a combination of Chuck Hobbs, our church business administrator, Karl Pandorf, our facilities manager, and Steve Lineberger, the chair of our Worship Committee, all rolled into one - - while at the same time also being the mayor of the city of Winston-Salem! That was the job of the ruler of the synagogue. Jairus was a person of great responsibility and social standing.

Second, the passage tells us **he had a crisis**. Something happened to his daughter, and she became very ill and died. The possibility of losing his little girl shook him to the core. Psychologists tell us that the death of a child is the #1 stress we can face in our lives. Some of you here today have had to deal with this kind of tragedy yourselves.

Crises come to us in many forms. It might be our health, or a marriage that is falling apart. It might be in your business, or a problem with a parent or a child. It might be dealing with the death of a loved one. Or maybe it's a crisis at school. A crisis comes, and it shakes you to the core.

Our middle son Jason was a chronic asthmatic growing up. As soon as we heard that tale-tell cough in the middle of the night, we knew we were in for a long ordeal. On two occasions Jason had acute asthma attacks which landed him in the hospital, and he almost died. My late wife Lorie and I were scared to death of losing him. Jairus was scared of losing his little girl, too.

In the middle of a crisis, people can be drawn to faith in unique and powerful ways. It stops us dead in our tracks, it gets our attention, and we seem to be open to God in a new way. Jairus realized he had a crisis, and he went straight to Jesus. That's the best thing you can ever do when you're in the middle of a crisis.

The third thing we learn about this man is **he made a request**. Even though he was a prominent person, well respected in the community, something happened to Jairus when his daughter got sick. He forgot his dignity, he lost his pride, and he came to Jesus and threw himself at the feet of the Lord and humbly asked for His help.

There are times when we have to up our dignity and push past our pride if we want to seek the help we need most from Christ. As long as we think we can handle it ourselves, if we believe we're too good to humble ourselves before God, we'll always be stuck in our crisis and never get the help we need. This man made his request, and the passage says that he pleaded earnestly, "*My daughter has just died. Please come and put Your hands on her, and she will live*" (v. 18).

The final thing we learn about Jairus is that **he experienced a miracle**. It's easy to give up in the middle of a crisis. It's easy to retreat when the going gets tough, and the path of least resistance is to throw up our hands in resignation. But the call of God is for us to keep on believing and keep on trusting, even in the face of death itself.

The text tells us they went to Jairus' home, and the Lord took the girl by the hand. And immediately she was healed. She got up, walked around, and everyone was amazed with the miracle.

Where are you tempted to give up this morning, and how is God calling you to keep on believing?

I. A Shunned Outcast.

The healing of the woman with the hemorrhage is sandwiched in between Jairus' plea and the healing of the little girl. Here we see that these two stories are brought together, and they come on the heels of the healing of two demoniacs in the previous chapter. All three stories have to do with the issue of ritual uncleanness.

According to Jewish law, contact with graves, contact with blood, and contact with death made a person ceremonially unclean and unacceptable to God in worship. The point of the healings is to show that Jesus was willing to get dirty in the messiness of life and to bring the healing power of God to the brokenness of the world. It also demonstrated what is most important to God – our faith in Him.

The precise nature of the woman's ailment is not stated. It was probably some sort of uterine disease which caused the bleeding that had persisted for 12 years. That's a long time to battle a chronic illness. She had suffered much and had been treated by many doctors. Mark tells us that she spent every penny she had to try and address the problem, but instead of getting better, her condition only worsened.

The result was she was not only broke, but she was also isolated because she was considered “unclean” according to the Jewish law. This meant she was unable to be with other people in public or in worship. So this woman had to stay by herself for fear of the embarrassment and shame. It’s likely that she lived in isolation, all alone, as a shunned outcast of society.

She couldn’t attend the synagogue, she couldn’t draw water at the common well with the other women. She couldn’t join in the festivals of her faith like everyone else. Add the words “poverty,” “shame,” “guilt,” “unclean,” “lonely,” and you have a picture of a woman who felt less than nothing. She was probably disgusted with herself as well as the system that kept her in bondage. And all this for 12 long years.

The reports she heard about Jesus led her to believe that maybe, just maybe, He could help her. So she sought Him out. But her faith seemed to be mixed with superstition. Apparently, she shared the belief which was common in her day that the power of a person could be transmitted through their clothing. So she went into the crowd and approached Jesus secretly from the rear. She thought, “If I can just touch His clothes, I might be healed.”

When she touched the hem of Jesus’ robe, her bleeding immediately stopped, and she felt a soundness in her body she hadn’t known for years. In Mark’s account of this incident, we’re told that Jesus stopped and asked, “Who touched Me?” The disciples were incredulous at His question. “Look around You, Master. There are so many people here. Everyone’s touching You!” But Jesus had the spiritual sensitivity and awareness to know that someone had touched Him for healing, and He felt the power go out of Him.

With fear and trembling, the woman acknowledged all that had happened. Then our Lord continued His healing, now not of the woman’s body, but of her soul. He said, “Daughter, your faith has healed you.” Christ made it clear it was the grasp of her faith and not the grasp of her hand that secured the healing she sought. The word that is translated “healed” is the same Greek word for “saved.” Both physical healing and spiritual salvation were present in the mind of Christ that day. She came for healing of her body, but what she left with was the salvation of her soul.

III. A Compassionate Savior.

Two very different people from different walks of life and very different socio-economic standings in the community. But notice the similarities in the way Jesus cared for both of them.

- He met them where they were at their own points of need.
- He left the crowd to minister to the individual.

- His power was not only over disease and death but also fear and embarrassment.
- He spoke words of assurance and comfort.
- He left unbelief outside and took belief inside with Him to bring about healing.
- And He was willing to touch what others considered unclean in order to bring the power of God to bear in their lives.

The Lord is never so near as when we need Him the most. He is always ready to reach down into our fractured lives and touch us here we hurt and heal us where we are broken. But we must acknowledge our need and we must humble ourselves before God if we ever hope to experience His healing and His grace.

Have you, like this woman, tried everything else to solve your problem? All of us tend to be like that. We try everything else before we come to God. It's when all else fails, we finally turn to the Lord. Let Christ meet you right where you are this morning. Quit trying to do it yourself. Take your problem to Jesus. A lifetime of belief requires persistent faith. In Chinese, the word "crisis" combines the characters of two other words: danger and opportunity. It all depends on your attitude.

Conclusion.

The events of the last few months with all the mass shootings have left us numb and in shock. It seems every week there is another new tragedy we have to absorb emotionally and deal with somehow. We wonder when all the madness will end.

In his book *Meet the Bible* author Philip Yancey writes: "In the Bible, heaven is not an afterthought or optional belief. It is the final justification of all creation. The Bible never belittles human tragedy and disappointment – is any book more painfully honest? – but it does add one key word: temporary. What we feel now, we will not always feel. The time for re-creation will come.

"For people who feel trapped in pain or in a broken home, in economic misery or in fear – for all those people, for all of us, heaven promises a future time...of health and wholeness and pleasure and peace. The Bible began with that promise, in the book of Genesis. And the Bible ends with that same promise, a guarantee of the future. The end will be a beginning."

How do you cope whenever crisis hits? By remembering the story isn't over yet, and God is still writing it. He still has another move He can make. We also cope by remembering this particular story of Jairus and the woman with the flow of blood and seeing God's tender compassion. And we cope by clinging to the promises of Scripture, which are new every morning. Turn to Jesus. He'll be with you, and He'll help you get through your crisis, whatever it is. Today and always. He is the King, and He still reigns in His kingdom. Amen.