

Waiting Interrupted

Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33

Mark 5:21-43

June 30, 2024

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Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul,
'therefore I will hope in him.'

The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.

It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.

For the Lord will not
reject forever.

Although he causes grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
for he does not willingly afflict
or grieve anyone.

Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live."

So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader

of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

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Kathleen and I first met in my first year of seminary. She was very intelligent, creative, fun-loving, spiritual, outgoing, energetic, and especially loved to work with children and youth groups. She definitely had a call to youth ministry and Christian education.

But for a while, this was not true for her. Things had changed dramatically for her during the past two years, when she had first began seminary. She had developed shortness of breath, heart palpitations, chest discomfort, and easily became weak and dizzy. For twelve months she had been seen, poked, prodded, tested and retested by numerous doctors, but no diagnosis, cure or relief was found.

Some doctors were quick to determine that this was stress and anxiety, and they suggested counseling and relaxation techniques. Kathleen readily followed their advice in hopes that they were right. Instead, her symptoms only grew worse. She tried different medications and then had to cope with various side effects and even a severe allergic reaction to one of them. The symptoms continued to worsen, and her despair grew. She had to give up her part-time job because her health made it impossible to continue working. She fell behind in her studies, delaying both her call and her dream.

Eventually, after twelve months of suffering, of being and feeling isolated from her friends, her work her life, a diagnosis was finally reached: mitral valvular stenosis, a condition that restricted blood flow around her heart. Kathleen underwent a surgical procedure to widen the heart valve opening, and when she was discharged from the hospital, the doctor pronounced her cured, pronounced her healed. She certainly didn’t feel the least bit cured or healed, however. True and thankfully, the mitral valvular stenosis and all of the accompanying symptoms were no longer a part of her life; the cardiac surgeon had seen to that. But Kathleen was in for a long recovery process. She had strength and energy to regain, a painful surgical wound on her chest, new medications to adjust to, and so much of her personal life to catch up on. She no longer endured a serious heart condition, but she was also not yet healed.

One of the first classes she took when she was able to return to ANTS was a course on the Gospel of Mark. The professor spoke about Mark’s writing style, that he often wrote ‘sandwich stories,’ that is, a story within a story. A number of times in his gospel, instead of telling two stories separately, Mark will start with one, move on to the second, and then come back and finish the first one. There are two reasons he wrote in this way. First, this style builds interest and tension until he returns to the story to resolve and finish it. Also, Mark wants us to see how the two stories are connected.

Our first example of these sandwiches, or in theological terms, ‘intercalations,’ was the experience of a woman who had been suffering for twelve years and that no treatment or cure could be found until Jesus healed her in their immediate encounter. Mark then tied that story to one of a young girl who had died because Jesus had delayed going to help her.

As Kathleen listened to the lecture, as she listened to the story of a wealthy and influential synagogue leader seek immediate and lifesaving help for his daughter, only to be interrupted by a socially unclean and outcast hemorrhaging woman, Kathleen listened to the amazing story of one woman whose interruption and delay of Jesus' trip to the home of the little girl may very well have cost her young life, she heard echoes of her own experience.

Ok, so she had not suffered for twelve years, it had been twelve months. but it was still a painfully long time. And she had not been a social outcast, but she had certainly felt like a misfit when she could no longer do all the important things in her life, and when she saw everyone else around her who did not struggle with some unknown, nameless yet debilitating condition.

She did know what it was like to feel excluded because health issues kept her away from others. And Kathleen certainly knew what it was to endure much under many physicians and spend all she had, yet only get worse instead of better.

Then her comparisons stopped. The hemorrhaging woman had risked discovery, rejection and failure as she worked to blend into the crowd and to dare to touch the hem of Jesus' robe to find, maybe even take, healing from him. With the courage of faith, the energy kindled by the anger of suffering, and the adrenaline of hope, the woman had stepped into the noisy and fast moving crowd that swarmed around Jesus. She had moved, maneuvered, and jostled her way through the mass of people to come close enough to the man she hoped in, trusted in, for healing. Perhaps with a sense that she could not explain, she knew that her wholeness, her freedom, were but inches and moments away if she could only touch this great and powerful man. She kept her head bowed low so that she would not be recognized, for surely they would not allow her to be here. What if she made the teacher unclean, as well as everyone around him? Finally her moment came, she was close to Jesus. She reached out her hand and the tips of her fingers brushed gently against the hem of his robe. Just as her fingertips felt the fabric, she felt the blood stop flowing. The woman who had dared to meet Jesus at the hem of his robe was healed.

Kathleen tried to think if she had taken any spiritual risks, if she had acted on the courage of her faith, or had she limited her attention and focus to just medical care? Had she let her faith guide her, comfort her, encourage her, during her twelve month ordeal? What had been the adrenaline of her hope? Was it anger, despair, or a faith-filled trust in God? Had she sought the touch of Jesus when she had been seeking healing?

The she heard the professor speak Jesus' words, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease." She thought of the prayers that she had spoken, whispered and cried. She thought of the prayer lists she had been on for God's healing grace. So yes, in her heart she too had reached out in faith to Jesus, and found his healing touch not in the hem of his robe, but in the skills of a cardiac surgeon. Her faith had not let despair take away hope, and it let her be made well again. Just as Jesus had spoken these words after the woman's bleeding had stopped, so Kathleen heard them after her heart condition was gone. In the operating room that had been an immediate event. Now, like the woman who had to reestablish her life as a part of her healing, so did Kathleen. And that was the delay. Another time of waiting.

Just as the father had to wait to see his daughter healed, just as the woman had waited years to be healed, just as Kathleen or any of us wait to be healed, God is already at work in us, and for us, in ways that we know as times of waiting. It is our time of waiting that is interrupted by the processes of healing. There is an onset—sometimes sudden, sometimes gradual—of symptoms, of pain, and we begin to seek renewed health. Yet outside of the miraculous healings that we know Jesus performed during his earthly life, there is no immediate healing. There is

naturally a delay, a process of recovery for healing and damage inflicted upon the body, upon the mind, upon the souls, for moving on whole and strong. Along the way as we journey back towards health, there is a diagnosis and a prognosis. There are good days and bad days, insights and experiences we have, learn and grow from. Our time of waiting is interrupted by visible, tangible, signs of the healing process. Our time of waiting is a time of healing, a time of rest and restoration. Healing may be a return to wholeness, it may be a new way of being. In our waiting we can find hope, comfort and relief in the delay process as we too hear and claim the healing words, “Your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” Amen.