

ORDINARY EASTER

Text: Mark 5:21-42

June 30, 2024

CONKLIN

“Triage” is the method used to prioritize those who need urgent medical assistance. It’s used especially on the battlefield or in areas where supplies and personnel are limited. It’s also used in natural disasters.

Medical staff “color-tag” the wounded or injured according to their condition. One color means hopeless—nothing can be done to save them. Another tag means they’ll make it even if they’re not helped. The third color-tag indicates a doubtful prognosis. They have a chance only if medical help is given. Assistance is usually given first to this last group.

A soldier named Lou was badly injured. The doctor who examined him made the decision that his condition was hopeless. He tagged him that way. A nurse noticed Lou was conscious and began to talk with him. They discovered they were both from Ohio. She just couldn't let him die. She broke the rules and changed his color-tag.

What followed was a two-day trip in the back of a truck and months in a hospital. Lou made it. He met a girl in the hospital and married her. Even minus one leg he led a full happy life. It was all because one nurse broke the rules of triage and changed a tag.

The pastor who told Lou’s story wrote: **“Maybe the task of the church is to go around changing the color tags.”**

It’s an idea worth exploring. Maybe we are supposed to change the tags persons put on themselves, each other and on the circumstances and conditions of their lives. What’s deemed “hopeless” isn’t. When there’s “no possible chance”, there is. Where we’ve given up, God hasn’t. The Church’s task is to preach and practice life, hope and resurrection; to show that death and despair aren’t the orders of the day.

This morning's text is from Mark. It's the designated lectionary gospel. Mark offers two interwoven and intersecting stories that at first seem unrelated, but truly aren't. They're about hope and healing and what happens when we have the courage to claim them.

A synagogue leader named Jairus comes to Jesus in desperate need. His young daughter is near death. He begs Jesus to come help her. Jesus does what we expect. He goes with the man. A crowd follows. In the crowd is a woman who's been bleeding for twelve years. She's spent all her money and "*endured much*" under many physicians. In other words, she has no more resources, and still doesn't have any answers or solutions. Sound familiar? Making matters worse, she's considered unclean in the eyes of her community, cast off as an outsider. Like the desperate father she turns to Jesus. "*If I could just touch him, I will be healed.*" She does and she is. Jesus stops and asks who touched him. When she confesses, in fear and trembling, he praises her faith and sends her away with a blessing.

The delay has a cost. A group comes from Jairus' house to tell him his daughter has died. Jesus goes there anyway. He finds everyone weeping and wailing. He looks at them and says, "*What are you doing? She's not dead. She's just sleeping.*" Mourning turns to mocking. The onlookers laugh. Who does he think he is? (Who indeed?) Jesus enters the house: takes her by the hand and says simply in Aramaic, "*Little girl, get up!*" She does. My favorite is that Jesus then directs them to get her something to eat! Mark says, "*They were overcome with amazement.*"

They were "**amazed.**" Amazed. Understatement? Astonished. Astounded. Understandably. We're so used to death; sometimes we don't know what to do when life is offered instead. We accept defeat, disappointment and death as ultimate end games. We know that script; both external critics and internal monologue. "*He's an addict, he can't change. She'll always do it like that. Things will never be any different for us. You won't every be*

enough. This is as good as it gets. One person can't fight the system. It's useless to try." How often looking at our lives, the lives of family and friends, the life of the world or even the life of our Church, do we describe the future in terms of what's "inevitable", what's "probable" or what's "statistically predictable"?

According to the Church calendar it's Ordinary Time. It's the "season after Pentecost". Easter is weeks behind us. Over and done until next year. Mark reminds us, it isn't. You can read these as healing stories that show us God's grace and power. You can also read them as "kingdom of God here on Earth". It makes visible God's care and concern for the little, the least, the marginalized and the poor. One more interpretation is as an **Easter story**. It seems so long ago—that early sunrise promise of transformation, resurrection and life. But it's about how Easter can occur anywhere, anytime. About the life Jesus came to give; the life we're invited to claim.

Jesus' resurrection is a promise of our own. God defeated the powers of death to raise Jesus. That same God can defeat the power death has over us **now as well as eternally**. The resurrection means death doesn't get the final word; **God does**. Jesus is Lord of life. He has the power to change things. He has the power to call into being a "new creation". That's a promise for your life and for mine. It's a promise for the church also. It's one our denomination and its local Churches need to reclaim.

Do you believe that? Do you believe Jesus can take what seems dead—a relationship, a life, a situation—a Church and raise it to new life? Do you believe Jesus can change bitterness to joy, guilt to forgiveness, and sickness to health? Do you believe he can set you free from a painful past, get you through an overwhelming and difficult present and give you a new future? Do you "really truly" believe it?

I'm trying. I've seen it happen. It's happened in my life and in the lives of those around me. Sometimes that new life wasn't just the way I asked for it, it took a different form and

direction than I thought. Sometimes it seemed contrary to what I had decided should occur. It happened. **For me resurrection is both a future hope and a present reality.**

The caveat: stories like these can be difficult to hear. Jesus heals a sick woman and restores a dead child to life. The problem is: That's not always how it is. We all know someone—maybe you are that someone—who's been struggling with illness and pain for a long time. They have faith. They pray. They ask to be cured. It hasn't happened. They're still suffering. We've all known grief as well. Our dead haven't been given back to us. We still cope with their loss. What can this text say to us? What can it offer us? How is it also our "good news"?

Bishop Hope Morgan Ward gives some helpful direction and insight in answering those questions. She reminds us that the root of the word "healing" in the New Testament is the same root for the words, "salvation" and "wholeness". Healing doesn't always mean being "cured", though it can include that gift. Nor does it always mean the absence of suffering. Healing as the New Testament understands it is a fullness of life beyond any given circumstances. In John Jesus explains: *A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.* It's the "peace that passes understanding" in the midst of pain. It's the faith that lives confident of blessing and God's love even when it's not immediately apparent how the blessing will come, or that love be made known. Comfort and courage. It's the grace we're given that enables us to cope when we can't.

Bishop Ward writes: *"Wholeness and health arise from contact with Jesus. The invitation of the text is to touch Jesus and to be touched by Jesus. Touched by Jesus, life begins anew"*.

This text challenges us. It tells us to ask Jesus for what we need trusting he'll give it. It invites us to reach out without fear of refusal or rejection. To keep trusting him even when it doesn't seem he's heard us or the answer to our prayer is plausible.

One author puts it this way: "Are we so sure of what we think are the facts that we laugh off the possibility of what God might actually be able to do?" Think about it. What chance would we take—what choice would we make—if we believed in a God who could raise people from the dead? What would we dare if we believed in a God who could turn a crucifixion into a resurrection? A God who could take the worst ending and make it a new beginning? What would we do if we believed in a God like that?

A young pastor was confronted by that question. She writes she's never forgotten it. I offer her story in closing illustration:

I joined the United Methodist Church at fifteen. I was from an unchurched family. I spent the next two years active in almost every part of that Church. (I even sang in the choir). At seventeen I left home and never went back. I graduated from a United Methodist college and was a US-2. Prior to our assignments we had ten weeks training in Nashville. Part of the training was an interview with Dr. Jonapher, the Religion and Psychology professor at Scarritt. At the interview we talked about my past and all that had and hadn't happened. We also talked of what was next.

Suddenly, Dr. Jonapher stopped. He asked me, "Do you believe in God?" It caught me off-guard. (I'd practically lived at the Church during high school. I was a religion major in college. Now I was going to work for the Church.) I stammered an answer. "Uh...yes. Yes. Of course I do." We talked more. He asked, "Do you think God has the power to change lives and people; to change you?" I stammered my answer. "Yes, of course...of course God can."

Dr. Jonapher stopped and looked at me. "You say you believe in God... you say you believe God has the power to change lives..." He paused. "Then why don't you live like it? Why don't you live like you say you believe?" I made some answer. I don't remember what. The interview ended.

Why don't you live like it? Why don't we live like it? I've asked it of myself and others many times. It's what I ask you today. Do you believe? Why not live like it? Why not risk God's grace, goodness and love? Why not believe God is still at work here? What would it do for us? What would it do to us? What would we do?

If God hasn't given up: Why should we? We may not be sure of what's ahead; we know who leads the way. We know who will be with us now and forever.

"They were overcome with amazement." By the grace of God may we be also.

PASTORAL PRAYER (6-28-09)

O God, in Jesus' resurrection you defeated death and broke its hold on him and on us You want us to know the joy of life abundant and eternal.

Forgive us, Lord. Forgive us when we imprison ourselves in what is so much less than you would give us. Forgive us for holding on to what hurts and harms us. Forgive us for assuming that we're trapped where we are and that nothing can change for us or for the world. Forgive us for forgetting who you are and what your love makes possible.

O God, give us the courage to reach out for your healing and whole-making touch. Empower us to shape our lives by the truth we have seen in Jesus. Widen our hearts to have compassion on the needs of others, especially those whom the world so often tries to silence. Help us to be your Easter people and live in ways that enable others to hear its good news.

Father, with confidence and trust we lift our prayers before you. We pray for those who are sick, those recovering from surgery, facing treatments and doing therapy. May they know your healing presence. We pray for their caregivers. Strengthen and sustain them in their ministry. We pray for those whose days are marked by hunger, poverty and despair. Show us where we may become for them a means of health and hope. We pray for those who are grieving and coping with the loss of someone they love. Fill their hearts with your peace. We pray for our Sierra Service Project Mission Team. As they bring blessing this week may they also receive it. We pray for pastors and their families and the Churches who are in transition in our Conference. May they know the grace of good endings and good beginnings.

Lord, make yourself known among us once again. Comfort, challenge and convict us. Use us to make known the saving work of Christ. Show us how to live this out every day. We pray as he taught us saying, "***Our Father...***"