



Matthew 9:18-26
Personal Jesus
Jesus Makes Us Alive

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I don't think I am going too far out on a limb to guess that most of us have come to God at some point in our lives and said something along the lines of, "God, I really need you in my life right now..." Sometimes we even go so far as to say something like: "God, if you get me out of this, I'll..." and then fill in the blank with whatever you might have said: quit smoking, actually study next semester, listen to your parents, clean out the garage, *really* start living by faith in Jesus...whatever it might have been that you told God you'd do. Gwen once asked God to help her at a certain time of her life and of course there's more to the story than just this...but the result was that she married me. So be careful what you say to God, right? Probably most of us, at some point in our lives, have cried out to God as an act of desperation.

This morning we're looking at two people who were in desperate situations when they turned to Jesus. They came to Jesus in dire straights. **While they both come to Him in faith, there's a definite sense here that they also were out of options.** They had nowhere else to turn, and so they act on their faith – even if it was at the end of the rope. And the thing that we see is that Jesus still honors them. He doesn't reply with "Oh, now you finally come to me... Well, you'll have to wait at the back of the line behind others who have greater faith." Instead, he has compassion and mercy.

Jesus has just gotten out of a boat after crossing Lake Galilee, returning to the town of Galilee. And out of the crowd comes this man who wants Jesus to come heal his only daughter, who's at home at death's doorstep. In Luke's account, he tells us that the guy's name is Jairus. Jairus isn't your ordinary Galilean. He's a leader of the local Jewish synagogue. In fact, the Greek word for "leader" really means "ruler or commander". So this is a guy who has status; he has influence on the life of the faith community – which is pretty much everyone in town. At this point in Jesus' ministry, He has already ruffled the feathers of the religious leaders. Jesus is not on their list of favorite rabbis because he doesn't have their credentials. So for this religious leader to come to Jesus, you know he's at his wits' end and Jesus is his last resort. So Jesus goes with him, and his disciples follow.

And while on his way, this woman who has been bleeding for 12 years manages to work her way through the crowd to the point that she could reach out and touch the fringe of his clothes. This woman is never named – here or in Luke. She's not an important local religious figure like Jairus. In fact, because of her bleeding, she would have been considered unclean, and therefore not welcome in the synagogue to worship. She would have also been socially ostracized because of her bleeding. Plus she's a woman, which already puts her down a few rungs on the social ladder. And then to top it off, her theology appears to be a little mixed up, or at least a little unorthodox...maybe even superstitious.

So: This woman has all the chips in life stacked against her at this point. Add it all up, and she is as far removed from Jairus as a person could be in their society. They're at polar opposite ends of the spectrum from one another. And yet they are in the exact same boat. She is also at the end of her rope, out of options, with nowhere to turn but to Jesus. She's tried everything else and nothing has worked to bring her healing so she can re-engage with society. And so all she wants to do is get close enough to touch his robe, and she believes that will heal her.

And that's exactly what she does. Now, in Luke's biography of Jesus, we get a little more detail about what transpired. In Luke 8 he writes that Jesus realized that something has transpired, that someone at touched him. But he's not sure who it was, because the crowds were pressing in around him as he walked toward Jairus' home and it was hard to know who it would have been. But he knew something had happened: that someone had touched him and that power went out from him. And because she matters to Jesus, he wants to talk with her. So he stops and asks "Who touched me?" After a few moments, the woman comes forward. This woman who was so nondescript that the crowds couldn't identify her when Jesus turned to look for her, is important enough to Jesus that he seeks her out. She finally comes forward out of the crowd. And she shares with everyone right there how she had been afflicted with this bleeding. So Luke gives us that in greater detail. Both authors then tell us that Jesus says that her faith has made her well.

In doing this, he's telling everyone there, first of all, that she's right. She's healed. She's clean. She can be accepted back into society and back into their religious system. He's doing her a favor by pronouncing her clean. Second of all, he makes it clear that her *faith* has healed her. We see this throughout the gospels. Jesus often says, “your faith has made you well.” Jesus can offer healing to us, but it takes our step of faith to believe that Jesus can and will do that in order for it to really happen in our lives. Our faith doesn't have to be perfect – certainly hers was far from it. Jesus can even be the last resort. **But: When we come to Jesus, with what little faith we can offer, he accepts us.**

Now the whole time this dialog is happening with this unimportant, unnamed, previously unclean woman, the all-important Jairus is waiting. Even if he was kind-hearted and understanding of her situation, he had to have been frustrated with this. He has the important title and position, not her. Almost certainly, in the previous 12 years, he was one of the people who had to remind her that she couldn't participate in worship services because of her bleeding (he wasn't in the position, in all likelihood, all 12 years, so maybe less than that...but he may have interacted with her before when in other roles). Regardless, they probably know each other. And maybe he felt bad for her in spite of the rules, or maybe he was arrogant toward her...we have no idea. Maybe she was angry and bitter toward him or maybe she realized he was just doing his job. But here they are, together, coming to Jesus.

Finally, Jesus turns his attention back to Jairus and his daughter and continues on to his house. Family and friends are gathered, mourning her death, and they laugh at Jesus when he assures them that she'll be ok.

I think it's easy for us to be critical of these people who doubt Jesus. But maybe we shouldn't be so judgmental of them, or of others like them: Have you ever doubted that Jesus might be able to work things out when the future looked bleak? Have you ever laughed at the notion that God could bring good out of a bad situation? This is not the only time we see this in Scripture. Maybe some of you will remember the passage in Genesis 18 that has this same response. The beginning of Genesis 18 tells us that the Lord visited

Sarah and Abraham, and did so in the form of three somewhat mysterious visitors. We're not told much about them. And here's what we read:

Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son." Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh" (Genesis 18:10-15).

So this is not the first time someone has laughed at the notion that God can do what seems impossible. And sometimes we probably have had similar responses, perhaps especially as other people have stepped out in faith: "Really, you think God is going to do *that*? You're believing God for *what*?" "She's only sleeping? She'll walk again?" Are you nuts? Because they don't believe, Jesus asks them to step out of the house. In Luke's account, he gives us more detail that the parents and three of Jesus' disciples go with him. The contrast is stark between those who had faith and those who didn't – and those who didn't don't get to witness what takes place. Instead, Jesus works with those who come to him in faith. And so he goes in, takes the girl by the hand and she gets up.

She comes back to walk, talk, eat, and play with her friends again. I imagine the parents stood there slack-jawed, then started hugging her, stammering, crying, almost hysterical with joy. And we see that as different as Jairus and the woman are in terms of their religious credentials and societal status, there is something that ties them together.

Both of these miracles come about because of the faith (little as it was) that led them to Jesus. What little faith they had was put into action. Their faith was all they had to offer to Jesus. Maybe they were like another guy

who wanted his daughter healed and when asked by Jesus if he believed that Jesus could do this, he replied, “I believe, help my unbelief.” They may have had some doubts about how this would actually turn out. But they didn’t let those doubts turn to cynicism or stop them from approaching Jesus. They came to him. Yes, they were at the end of their ropes. It's not like the faith they offered was foremost in their lives. Wandering teachers, itinerant faith healers and the like – such as Jesus was viewed in his day, besides being considered a “rabbi” by some – they were the last people that someone of Jairus' stature would turn to in their culture. Certainly he'd been to all the best doctors. And then pile on the religious tension his fellow Jewish leaders had with Jesus...and clearly, coming to Jesus was a last resort. It was a humbling experience. But that’s where Jairus was.

Maybe that’s where some of us are this morning. Many here in Kirkland and throughout the Eastside are well-educated, make a decent living, maybe are known in certain circles for being good at something or knowledgeable on a certain topic...you’re respected by your neighbors, you pay your taxes, You recycle everything you can, and you root for the Huskies ☺. And maybe the idea of turning to Jesus has always seemed like it’s mostly for other people and would only be a last resort for you, if Jesus could ever even *be* a consideration.

Others in our community are more like this woman: continually in humiliating experiences, and ostracized from “mainstream” society – on the edge financially, constant health struggles that make relationships a challenge, and you’re rooting for...some other university, whatever it may be. (Light-hearted fun, folks!)

And yet, when we’re in the presence of Jesus, none of those differences matter. They both step forward with what little faith they have, accompanied by whatever doubts they may have had, and when they’re at the end of their ropes. They have more in common than they could ever have imagined. He, in his abundance, realizes that he *still* doesn’t have enough; She in her scarcity never dreamed she *could* have enough. And they find out that Jesus is enough. And they’re drawn together by their desperate need for Jesus in their lives. He’s the one who makes them both truly alive as Jarius’s daughter

is literally brought back to life and this woman is restored and healed and brought back into mainstream society.

And standing before each of them, and what brings them together, is Jesus. He's not offended by the fact that they only come to him out of desperation, when nothing else has worked. He's not intimidated by, or turned off by, Jairus's status and power, and he's not repulsed by the woman's lack of status and power. He interacts with them both. He listens to them. He has compassion on them. He meets both their needs. He takes time to connect with each of them personally and to know their story, to find out what's going on in their lives. And it matters very little to him what they look like, or how society views them, or even whether they've got right theology and live out their faith exactly right. They are welcomed into his presence, and Jesus meets each of them right where they are.

Jesus also welcomes us, even when we have the smallest of faith. Your background doesn't matter. You don't have to have perfect theology, or have a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible, or have read all of C.S. Lewis' books. You don't have to have it all together, or even pretend to have it all together. Like Jairus and this woman, we can even come to him even after trying everything else to find fulfillment and healing in our lives for the pain and the hurt that we feel – other religions, sex, drugs, alcohol, escapism, materialism, workaholism, television, you name it. People will try anything to be healed of the pain in their lives or to ignore it and try to escape it. But the only one who can totally cure it is Jesus Christ. That's not to say we shouldn't go to medical professionals and counselors, and so forth...But even if we come to him after trying everything else...even if Jesus is our last resort, He can take that small amount of faith, and he can do something with it.

He doesn't need much from us. In fact, coming to Jesus when we're at the end of our ropes is not a bad place to be at, at all. Maybe hitting rock bottom is good, because we find that at the bottom, the rock is solid. A pastor was teaching some children and began to ask them some questions, and it illustrates this for us well. He asked them, "If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into Heaven?" he asked the children. "NO!" the children all answered.

"If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into Heaven?" Again, the answer was, "NO!" "Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children, and loved my wife, would that get me into Heaven?" Again, they all answered, "NO!" "Well then...how can I get into Heaven?" he asked. A five-year-old boy shouted out, "YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!!!"

That's true, right? And you can't be much closer to rock bottom and at the end of the rope than dead. We can be spiritually dead, emotionally dead, at a dead-end in life. But with just the tiniest bit of faith, whatever we can offer, Jesus can work with. That doesn't mean He wants to leave us in our places of small faith. I can only imagine that after Jairus and this woman had these encounters with Jesus that their faith grew exponentially. God wants to lead us to a place of faith that bears much fruit, from being dead to being truly alive. But he accepts us just as we are when we come to Him – even when it's a last resort.

So: What faith do you have to act on and offer to Jesus, so that He might do something amazing in your life? I invite you to bring whatever level of faith you have...even if faith seems like the last resort and only for people who aren't like you...and come to Jesus and ask him to heal your life as well. Jesus wants a personal relationship with you. He lived, died, and rose from the grave to do that...but there's still a response from us to come to him in faith. Like these two people in today's passage: no matter where you are on the religious or societal spectrum, Jesus will take you in. He is He's waiting with arms wide open to welcome you, to listen to you, to love on you and take care of you...to grow this personal relationship with you. Whatever is sick, dying, or dead in your life He can heal and infuse with new and abundant life that begins today and lasts into eternity, and it all starts with a personal relationship with Jesus. Let's pray...Amen.