



from the desk of . . .

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#737

8 January 2017

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

Mark 5:21-43

In 1871, tragedy struck Chicago as fire ravaged the city. (X) When it was finally extinguished, the disaster had taken over 300 lives & left 100,000 homeless.

A man by the name of Horatio Gates Spafford (X) was one of those who tried to help the people of the city get back on their feet.

Spafford, a Chicago lawyer, had invested heavily into the downtown area, & he too lost all his properties as a result of the great fire.

More tragically, Spafford had also suffered the loss of his only son to scarlet fever just a year earlier. Still, for the next 2 years, Spafford assisted those individuals ruined by the fire, the homeless, the impoverished, & the grief-stricken.

At which point, Spafford & his family planned to go to England to join their friend, D. L. Moody, on one of his evangelistic crusades. And then, following the crusade, they would take a much needed family vacation & travel throughout Europe.

Horatio Spafford was delayed due to business, but sent his family, his wife & 4 daughters, on ahead. He would catch up to them on the other side of the Atlantic.

Their ship, the Ville du Havre, (X) never made it. Off Newfoundland, it collided with an English sailing vessel, the Loch Earn ... & sank within 12 minutes.

Although Horatio's wife, Anna, was able to cling to a piece of floating wreckage, one of only 61 survivors, their 4 daughters ... Maggie, Tanetta, Annie, & Bessie ... were among the 226 who drowned.

Horatio received the horrible telegram from his wife ...
 "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

Spafford boarded the next available ship to be with his grieving wife.

When that ship passed near the spot where his daughters died, Spafford penned these precious words:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
 When sorrows like sea billows roll;
 Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
 "It is well, it is well with my soul."

Tho' Satan should buffet, tho' trials should come,
 Let this blest assurance control,
 That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
 And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

Every one of us has been impacted by tragedy ... by trials ... both individual & as a community. Whether it was physical or relational, financial or emotional, either personally or to a loved one, we have all experienced pain.

We have all faced the trials of life.

The truth is ... we live in a broken world, & as a result adversity & sadness will always be with us,
though I pray not to the level of Horatio Spafford.

In our Gospel passage today we are confronted with a father who is experiencing a severe trial ... a tragedy; & a woman who has had a lingering disease.

Their response to their situations has much to teach us.

Listen now to Good News from Mark, to you who have gathered here for worship at Community Church.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

Jesus went back across to the other side of the lake. There at the lakeside a large crowd gathered around him. (X) Jairus, an official of the local synagogue, arrived, and when he saw Jesus, he threw himself down at his feet and begged him earnestly, "My little daughter is very sick. Please come and place your hands on her, so that she will get well and live!"

Then Jesus started off with him. So many people were going along with Jesus that they were crowding him from every side.

There was a woman who had suffered terribly from severe bleeding for twelve years, even though she had been treated by many doctors. She had spent all her money, but instead of getting better she got worse all the time. She had heard about Jesus, so she came in the crowd behind him, saying to herself, "If I just touch his clothes, I will get well." (X)

She touched his cloak, and her bleeding stopped at once; and she had the feeling inside herself that she was healed of her trouble. At once Jesus knew that power had gone out of him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

His disciples answered, "You see how the people are crowding you; why do you ask who touched you?"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. The woman realized what had happened to her, so she came, trembling with fear, knelt at his feet, and told him the whole truth. Jesus said to her, "My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your trouble."

While Jesus was saying this, some messengers came from Jairus' house and told him, "Your daughter has died. Why bother the Teacher any longer?"

Jesus paid no attention to what they said, but told him, "Don't be afraid, only believe."

Then he did not let anyone else go on with him except Peter and James and his brother John. They arrived at Jairus' house, where Jesus saw the confusion and heard all the loud crying and wailing. He went in and said to them, "Why all this confusion? Why are you crying? The child is not dead - she is only sleeping!"

They started making fun of him, so he put them all out, took the child's father and mother and his three disciples and went into the room where the child was lying. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha, koum," which means, "Little girl, I tell you to get up!" (X)

She got up at once and started walking around. (She was twelve years old.) When this happened, they were completely amazed. But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone, and he said, "Give her something to eat." (Mark 5:21-43)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

Our hearts literally ache when we think of Horatio & Anna Spafford. But in the midst of their tragedy ... they turned to Jesus. And here in our Gospel lesson, Jairus' heart is also broken ... & he too, turns to Jesus.

We're told that Jairus was "an official of the local synagogue." (He was the Moderator of Council.) Jairus was a man of prominence; one of the most respected men in the community. When Jairus spoke ... people listened. When Jairus walked into a room ... everyone would stand in recognition. He was a man who had much.

But at this moment, none of that mattered!

Sickness & death could care less about who we are, what we possess, or the position that we hold.

Tragedy is not a respecter of persons.

And my guess is ... Jairus would have traded everything at that moment in exchange for his daughters' health. Life had become much defined for him! His "little girl", the one that Luke describes as "his only daughter" (Luke 8:42) ... was dying.

Tragedy helps us to properly evaluate things. What we think is essential now, what we believe is important, will cease to matter then.

There's a conversation that I've had repeatedly over the years with various people who have been in the hospital suffering from some serious illness.

"Rande, all the problems I've faced in my life were nothing compared with this. I would give up my money; I would give up all the things that I own ... to only have my health back."

Trials put life into perspective. Trials define us. They speak to the maturity of our faith. (James 1:2-3)

Interestingly, the name Jairus means ... "God will enlighten" ... & that's just what will happen to him.

Notice how this man of position & power came before Jesus. The Scriptures tell us that "he threw himself down at Jesus' feet." The Greek word here (πιπτει) means ...

"to descend from a higher place to a lower level."

In other words, this man of prominence humbled himself in the presence of the Lord of Glory. This, by the way, would not be something that Jairus was used to doing. Normally people bowed down to him.

So, here's a Scriptural truth that we all need to grasp. In order to be transformed by The Holy Spirit ... we must humble ourselves. (X)

"Humble yourselves, then, under God's mighty hand, so that he will lift you up." (1 Peter 5:6)

The very 1st step of the Christian life is to realize that we cannot be anything other than indebted to God. Ponder that thought for a moment ... we cannot be anything other than indebted to God. (X) "For it is by God's grace that we have been saved through faith.

It is not the result of our own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

One of the greatest truths in the Scriptures is this ... the way up is down. The way up is to empty ourselves of self & pride, & allow Jesus to fill us with His Spirit.

Jesus is so straightforward; He's crystal clear. (X)
To be great in God's Kingdom we must be willing to serve.
(Mark 10:43)

When we come to the place where we see our own inability ... & recognize His ability ... then, & only then, are we in a position to receive fully from Him.

When Jairus came to Jesus, "he threw himself down at his feet" & made his desperate petition to the Lord.

"My little daughter is very sick. Please come & place your hands on her, so that she will get well & live!"

What an incredible statement of faith! (X)

Each of us must come to the place in our lives where we recognize that while we cannot ... He can! (Matthew 19:26)

Well, Jesus is moved by Jairus' faith & starts off with him to his house. Once again, as I place myself in this story ... I'm Jairus, & Jesus is coming to my house ... my daughter is going to be okay!

But at that very moment they hit a little bump in the road. Well actually for Jairus, it's a huge bump. As Jairus is attempting to hurry Him along, a woman who had been suffering from severe bleeding for 12 years, causes Jesus to take a slight detour.

Let's be honest, guys, there's no way that we can appreciate this from a physical aspect, & we we're not going to do much better from a theological standpoint.

Here's a woman who has experienced severe internal bleeding for 12 years. This issue of blood was a physical problem. For 12 years this woman was sick. Every day, every hour, every minute, every second ...
she was aware of her physical condition.

All the women here this morning have some idea of what this woman was going through because you can relate more to the issue of blood than we men can.

From what I understand, for most ladies, the average period lasts between 3 & 5 days each month. But this woman had suffered for 12 years with constant bleeding.

Now that certainly had to take a toll. We have to imagine that she was anemic & physically weak.

In 1st century Palestine there were places that were sort of like hospitals. But, unlike today, there would have been no method of transfusion to replace lost blood. And again, compared to what we're used to, Dr.s back then offered very substandard care. They would prescribe herbs & perform some basic surgery on external wounds, but fixing internal bleeding would have been far beyond their ability.

Regardless, this woman spent all her money on many Dr.s, "but instead of getting better she got worse." She had tried everything, humanly possible, to get well, but nothing worked. She was at the end of her rope.

Now, if all that wasn't bad enough, this woman had another horrible situation to contend with. According to Jewish law, because of her bleeding, she wasn't welcomed in society. She was unclean, defiled, & impure.

The Levitical law stated ... "when a woman has her monthly period, she remains unclean for 7 days."

(Leviticus 15:19)

And, "if a woman has a flow of blood for several days outside her monthly period or if her flow continues beyond her regular period, she remains unclean as long as the flow continues, just as she is during her monthly period. (Leviticus 15:25)

Bleeding for 12 years meant she had been "unclean" for 12 years. Unable to touch anyone all that time; & in fact, anything she touched was also considered unclean. Her clothes were considered unclean. Her furniture was considered unclean. Her home would be considered unclean. (Leviticus 15:20) No visitors. No friends.

For 12 years she was regarded as an outcast. She knew loneliness. She knew how it felt to be ignored by people. If she was married, for 12 years she couldn't touch her husband or her children ... if she had any.

She wasn't allowed to walk in the streets where there were people. She wasn't allowed to carry on "normal" activity. Nobody dared to come & visit her. For all practical purposes, she was all alone in this world.

Imagine her feeling of hopelessness & desperation. I believe this woman was at a point where she was ready to give up. She was ready just to lie down & die.

I wouldn't be surprised if some of us have felt that way at some point in our lives. I confess that I have.

Maybe someone here is feeling like that today.

If that's the case ... you need to do just what this unnamed woman did. She sought out Jesus.

She needed healing. He was her last chance. Having said that, she probably had no idea just how large the crowd around Jesus would be; all those people surrounding Him, pressing in to touch Him.

There was no way for her to speak privately to Jesus. There was no way for her to approach Him & look Him in the eye & asked to be healed. So she thinks to herself ... "If I just touch his clothes, I will get well."

Something inside told her that just one touch would change everything. Then she sees her opportunity & she takes it. The woman manages to get behind Jesus, & she reaches out her hand & touches His robe.

"And her bleeding stopped at once; & she had the feeling inside herself that she was healed of her trouble."

For the 1st time in 12 years she felt whole. For the 1st time in 12 years there was peace, real peace in her heart. No pain, no isolation ... she was healed!

At that point, all she wanted to do was disappear back into the crowd.

12 long years, but now she could rebuild her life.

But then, suddenly, Jesus stops & calls out. Can you imagine this woman's fear as she hears Jesus ask ...

"Who touched my clothes?"

To which the disciples' respond ...

"What are you talking about? With this crowd pushing & jostling you, dozens have touched you!"

But Jesus continues to look. I believe He already knew who had touched His robe, but He wanted the woman to reveal herself to the crowd.

Luke records Jesus saying ... "Someone touched me, for I knew it when power went out of me." (Luke 8:46)

The woman saw Jesus' eyes looking for her. Should she run? Was she in trouble? According to Jewish law, she had been unclean ... & touching Jesus would have made Him unclean. If she confessed she could be punished for breaking the Levitical laws. (Leviticus 15:31)

"The woman came, trembling with fear, knelt at his feet,
& told him the whole truth."

We can almost see the crowd pulling back as this unclean woman comes forward? "That's the bleeding woman. 12 years unclean. Keep away from her."

But as she's trembling with fear, kneeling in front of Jesus, He looks down at her, not with anger, but with compassion. "My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, & be healed of your trouble."

This woman, who expected punishment, is given a blessing of shalom. And Jesus confirms for the whole crowd to hear: she is well, she is clean, her suffering is over. That was the amazing interruption in this story.

Henri Nouwen, (X) who was a Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer, & theologian, remarked that in the prime of his career he often became frustrated by the many interruptions to his work.

He was teaching at Notre Dame, & had a heavy agenda each day, & he didn't like being disturbed. Then one day, the truth of ministry dawned on him ...

that the interruptions were his work.

Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans. And often we'll find that the interruption is usually of greater consequence, of greater importance ...
than what we were doing.

Jesus said ... (X) "the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve." (Mark 10:45) How can we do less?

But the story isn't over yet. Jairus must be almost beside himself. Can you imagine his impatience as he's waiting through this encounter with the woman? He stands 1st on one leg & then the other.

"Come on Jesus ... my daughter ... remember?"

Finally, just as they're ready to move on,

"some messengers came from Jairus' house & told him,
'Your daughter has died.

Why bother the Teacher any longer?"

And at that desperate moment, it's interesting to see how faith reacts. Jairus had placed his total faith in Jesus, & even in the face of death, even in the midst of this tragedy ... that faith doesn't waiver.

"Jesus paid no attention to what they said, but told him,
(X) 'Don't be afraid, only believe.'"

Wow! Ponder that. ... Jesus is saying to him,
"Don't believe what you hear; don't believe what you know; don't believe what you see ... trust me."

That's the lesson that faith has for us today. Every instinct & every indicator may say ...

"The situation is hopeless. Nothing can be done."

Jesus says ... "only believe."

Well, in light of the miracle which he had just witnessed, Jairus was no doubt inclined to believe.

It was customary in those days to hire mourners to cry, actually wail, at the death of an individual. They would rip their cloths apart, tear out their hair, & cry out with loud shrieks & howls. This was done to represent the terrible despair that people felt in the presence of death. (1 Corinthians 15:56)

So this is what Jesus comes upon when He arrives at Jairus' house. But He just looks at everybody ...

"Why all this confusion? Why are you crying?
The child is not dead - she is only sleeping!"

This story has been told to Mark by Peter, who had witnessed it. In fact, it had made such an impression on Peter that he never forgot it, & even related the very words Jesus used ... "Talitha, koum." (X) "Little girl, I tell you to get up!" And ... "give her something to eat."

Peter was amazed at that ... that the Lord would think so tenderly of this girl as to remember her need for nourishment after such an ordeal.

So, why has this passage been given to us in Scripture? I can sum it up in a few words ... limited views mean limited lives. If our view of life is made up only of what we can see & feel & taste & smell & hear & reason ... then we're living apart from Jesus Christ.

(Hebrews 11:1)

But this entire account of the healing of the woman, & the raising of Jairus' daughter teaches us to lift up our eyes & look beyond the visible to the realities of God, (The Psalms 123:1); to live in the full dimensions of life as God intended life to be lived.

Life can never be explained entirely in terms of the natural. God brings a depth of enrichment to us that we cannot possibly measure ...

& we should never leave Jesus out of the equation.

Horatio Spafford's ending verses speak of those who understand that trials, that difficulties, that sufferings & tragedies come to us in this life.

It speaks to those whose faith is mature.

My sin, O, the bliss of this glorious tho't
 My sin, not in part, but the whole,
 Is nailed to the cross, & I bear it no more,
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And, Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
 The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
 The trump shall resound & the Lord shall descend,
 "Even so", it is well with my soul.

So, how about you? Is it well with your soul today?
 ... If not, let me challenge you to seek out Jesus. (X)

"Don't be afraid, only believe."

MARANA THA