

Homily, St. Andrew's... baptism!
Proper 13B, June 28, 2015
Mark 5:21-43

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Before we baptize little Emma Belle in just a few minutes, let us take a moment to consider this sacrament and ritual in light of our Gospel story today.

Today we hear a story of 2 healing miracles... one sandwiched in the other. It begins with Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, approaching Jesus with great humility and trust, falling at Jesus' feet, to beg for healing for his sick daughter. Jesus responds without question, simply going with Jairus, presumably to his home. Among the crowd following them is nameless woman who has been suffering from haemorrhage for years, and who decides to simply touch Jesus' cloak from behind, instead of making a direct request for healing from him. The differences between these 2 people in need could hardly be greater. The first: a man whose name we know; a man of importance, power and wealth; a leader in the community. The second: a nameless woman with an affliction that made her poor from spending money on doctors who didn't help and who would have been marginalized because her illness made her perpetually, ritually unclean and therefore required her to be apart from the community. The two people are from the opposite ends of the socioeconomic scale and yet both are in need, both are desperate and both seek Jesus for healing. As the saying goes: The rain falls on the poor and the rich, the saints and the sinners, alike.

Perhaps because of the differences in their station, their socioeconomic status, they seek Jesus' help in very different ways. Jairus is direct, forthright and confident in his request while demonstrating the same humility he would be accustomed to others showing him in begging for favours. His request is only indirect in that the healing is needed not for himself but for his daughter, who is close to death. The woman, on the other hand, needs healing for herself and chooses an approach that is indirect and yet one that she is confident will work while she remains anonymous, like a shadow, as she had very likely become accustomed to in her state of uncleanness

The differences in the circumstances of each one are great and yet both experience obstacles in their quest for healing. The woman's obstacles are most obvious... The doctors she had sought help from only made her condition worse while also bankrupting her, and her illness itself created a separation from her community, socially and ritually, thereby limiting her options. This poor, suffering woman had surely become accustomed to obstacles in her life and perhaps had little to lose in seeking out the magic power she seems to believe Jesus to possess. But "Jesus is not a healer with magic powers to sell." (NIB, 589) Rather, Jesus is God Incarnate... the God of Life in flesh and bones, who recognizes when power has gone out of him and so the sought become the seeker. Jesus asks who touched him and despite the doubt of his disciples, the woman knows she is caught and finally comes forward in fear and trembling. She has no money to pay for the magic power she had stolen from Jesus, or so she and the crowd may well have thought. She had no means of purifying what she had defiled in touching another in her state of uncleanness. And her understanding of her immediate experience of healing means that she knows she is in the presence of extraordinary divine power. For all these reasons, a response of

fear and trembling at being found out makes a great deal of sense. But Jesus in neither a typical magician seeking payment nor concerned with ritual purity. And the divine power of Jesus is something to be respected but not feared. With Jesus, the kingdom of God is at hand and instead of rebuke, Jesus commends the woman's faith as the real source of her healing.

The obstacles for Jairus are less obvious at first glance but are at least as difficult to overcome. As a man of influence and wealth, he had none of the woman's socioeconomic or ritual obstacles. Instead, the main obstacle Jairus had to face was death... or the report of his daughter's death by others who encourage him to therefore leave Jesus alone. But Jesus overhears the perceived problem... and death really is a problem, a serious obstacle, to healing... but still Jesus implores Jairus to faith: "Do not fear, only believe." Maybe Jairus had heard Jesus' final words to the woman: "Your faith had made you well..." and overcomes the obstacle, choosing instead to take Jesus to his home. But at home another obstacle is encountered... mourning has begun and at the news that the child "is not dead, but sleeping," the people laugh. But such discouraging mockery is not enough to dissuade Jairus, or Jesus or the girl's mother for that matter. Together they enter the sickroom and revive the little girl. Jairus is not directly commended for his faith but then he had just demonstrated his faith by not bowing to peer pressure and instead risking foolishness and public mockery. Jairus' faith is commended in the renewed life of his daughter.

Two desperate people, from very different walks of life, with very different circumstances who both overcome obstacles to live out their faith and their hope that Jesus can heal. And Jesus responds to each one in a distinct and personal way that brings the gracious and loving outcome each had risked in their seeking. The rain might fall on the poor and the rich alike but so too does the grace of God's deep and broad healing love.

Through baptism today, we welcome Emma Belle into the body of Christ, and she becomes a member of Christ's church who is invited to fully and equally participate in the life of the community. From her baptism on, she is invited to feast at Christ's table with all of us, Sunday by Sunday, not for anything she has done, not because of what she understands and not as a reward for what she gives in time, talent or treasure. She, with all of us, is included simply because she is a child of God, no better and no worse than anybody else, of infinite value just because she is herself. Our differences in socioeconomic status, in role, in gender, in age and in every other way we are each unique may impact the specific ways in which we live out our faith, how we express our need and how Jesus responds to us, and those things will change over time, but none of it determines our worthiness for healing or for love. The grace of God's deep and broad healing love is available to everyone. It is not magic and it's not for sale. Rather as the body of Christ, it is our responsibility, and our gift, to embody this inclusive, all encompassing love, as do in baptism this morning, that the whole world may know healing and peace.