

Fear vs. Faith: Part 3
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When I was a senior in HS the show ER first aired on NBC (PIC). It was a huge success from the very beginning, which meant it wasn't going to be my kind of show. One of the reasons I didn't like it so much - though I think it's why it was so popular - was the over-the-top drama. Every single show, it seemed, once in a lifetime events would happen. I couldn't accept that every day there were riots in the waiting room and gunfights between patients; I've been to an ER before and they are not that exciting. I know there are days like that in some ERs, especially in urban centers, where there's a lot of tension and stress; where doctors and nurses are running from patient to patient in a frantic attempt to save people's lives. And I'm guessing on those days the fear is palpable.

Jesus had one of those days, too; it's the scene from our passage today. You'll notice in our reading that life and death hang in the balance; a lot of people are urgent and desperate and the fear is thick. But in the middle of it all is Jesus helping the fearful have faith. That's what I want to have - faith. It's what I want you to have. True, authentic faith when the times get tough; when there are all kinds of reasons to be afraid, but where faith rises instead. That's what God wants to give us today from his word so let's read that together (READ Luke 8:40ff).

You're supposed to get caught up in the drama and urgency of the scene like you're watching ER. First, we have a little girl, about 12 years old, dying. The only daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. He's religious man; a man of position and authority. He is one of those guys Luke has described earlier in this gospel as rich and full. But a trial has found Jairus; his little girl is sick. How can that be? Bad things aren't supposed to happen to "good people", right? We all know better that trials come to everybody and there are no "good people." So, he realizes he's poor and empty just like everybody else. And thankfully, he knows this enough to humble himself and throw himself at the feet of Jesus to ask for him.

As they are going to help this girl (I'm guessing with some pep in their step - she's dying) and with people pressing all around Jesus, another need emerges (the ER is getting a little chaotic). Vs. 43 tells us about a woman. The woman already fits into the sick, poor and empty category. She has been suffering with a chronic condition of bleeding for 12 years (same age as the little girl). But the physiological issue is probably not her greatest concern; you see her medical issue has created a social and spiritual problem. According to Jewish culture and law, this woman was ceremonially unclean. The law of God says that when men or women have open sores or bloody discharges they need to get those sores or wounds taken care of and then be purified. Only after purification would they be able to worship God in the temple and interact with people socially.

But what if the bleeding never stops? What if you can never get clean? That's the predicament for this woman. If you're never clean you can never go to the temple and worship

God. You always have to stay outside of the city isolated from people. You can't even experience the blessing of human touch because you might infect somebody with your unknown condition and make them unclean, too. This woman, most certainly, has gone through a social and spiritual hell for 12 straight year. And to top it off, she's broke. Vs. 43 says she's spent "all her living" on physicians and she's never gotten better. I'm thinking she's on the brink of despair.

Now, no doubt, Jairus is desperate. Time is of the essence; we've got to get Jesus to my little girl if she has any chance of living. But I'm thinking this woman was no less desperate. I'm thinking she felt the same sense of urgency as Jairus.

So, the scene is set. Both the woman and Jairus have an opportunity; they both have a decision to make. They can let fear get the best of them. Or they can press through their fear and have faith in Jesus. It's not so much that you either have fear or faith; it's not quite that simple. The question is more: when you are afraid, will you have faith or will you give into your fear? Because what you will see with both Jairus and the woman is that the fear really never left them; it's just that they didn't give into their fear. So, I'm giving you a hint: both Jairus and the woman are examples of faith. They give us a picture of what we should do in our moments of fear. Remember, we learned from the parable of the sower what faith looks like. It looks like holding fast to the word of God and bearing fruit with much patience. And that's "easy" when all is well, but when trials come will we keep holding fast to Jesus' words and bear fruit or will we cave?

We first have to start with the woman. Look at Jesus' words in vs. 48, "And he said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.'" Jesus tells this woman and he tells us, the readers, that what this woman did was an expression of faith. So, what was that? Let's first recount the scene.

It sounds like Jesus was sandwiched in a crowd. Look at the end of vs. 42; "As Jesus went, the people pressed around him." That's the point of that sentence, right? Jesus was pressed by the people. When Jesus stops and says, "Who was it that touched me?" what does Peter say? "Jesus, *everybody* is touching you! We're all squished by the crowds. Come on! Let's get going!" So, imagine what this woman had to do to get to Jesus. As a ceremonially unclean person, she had to fight a crowd of people to get right next to Jesus to touch him.

I've gone to plenty of Christian conferences where famous or well-known preachers taught God's word. And without fail after the session they are mobbed up front by people. They get asked questions; people want to engage them in discussion. Some people want to get a selfie with them. I kid you not that if I wanted to get close to so-n-so preacher after a session I would pretty much have to push my way through a crowd in a socially unacceptable way; I'd have to be rude.

That's the image I have of this woman; pushing herself through the obstacles to get to Jesus. I think this is the point Luke is trying to make, too. Here's why I think that. Remember how I pointed out to you from vs. 42 that Luke wants us to know that the people were pressing in on Jesus. Do you know what word Luke used? It's the word *choked*. "The people pressed, were choking, around Jesus." The exact same word used in Luke 8:14, which says, "And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life."

Luke is connecting the teaching of Jesus with this story and we're supposed to wonder, "Will Jesus and his power be choked from bearing fruit?" The seed, the word of God, the person of Jesus Christ, has all the power necessary to bring forth miracles, but for you and I to experience this power we need to have faith. We need to hold fast to Jesus and to his word and we need to be patient to see that word produce fruit. For 12 years this woman has endured the worst; physical, spiritual and social challenges and isolation. But Jesus is being choked by the people; how is she going to get the help she needs?

This woman presses through. She pushes her way in. Her faith emerges when her desperate need is combined by a relentless push to touch the man who has healing in his wings. She was not going to be denied.

Friends, this is an important picture or aspect of faith. True faith has an earnestness to it; true faith does not give up. It fights. Faith isn't denied in the face of obstacles. Half-hearted faith doesn't quite cut it. God says to his children in Deut. 4:29, "But from there [from your desperate places] you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul." If! If you search for him with all your heart! That's what this woman did. She was not going to be denied. The miracle worker, Jesus, is in town. I believe he is the One and if I can just touch him I will be healed!

When my lovely wife misplaces something that's important, watch out! She get's locked in a search and rescue mission until the lost is found. She doesn't stop. Lunch can wait; supper can wait. She will stay up at night turning the house upside down. It actually turns into spring cleaning because she's looking in places she hasn't looked for years, sees that it's a little dusty and starts cleaning, too. I've said plenty of times in our years of marriage, "Honey, take a break. Maybe after you take a break you'll find it." She's relentless. Have you ever had a child come to you and say, "I can't find my shoes," you send them away to keep looking and they come back, like, 3 minutes later saying "Still can't find them. I give up!" And then you walk in their room, move one piece of clothing on the floor and voila, there they are! That's a good contrast between seeking with all one's heart and half-hearted seeking.

Do you seek the Lord with all your heart? Do you push and push to see, to know, to get close to Jesus no matter the cost? Are you willing to miss lunch and supper; are you willing to stay up late looking for God in the scriptures, looking for God in prayer? Psalm 88:1 says, "O Lord, God of my salvation; I cry out day and night before you." Have you done that? Have you

worn out your knees in prayers to God? Have you skipped suppers to seek God and his help? Or do you tend to give up quickly? You say a quick prayer one day and then give up the next because it doesn't seem to work?

Jairus was tempted to give up. Look at vs. 49 (READ). She's dead, Jairus! Just give up. Don't bother Jesus anymore. What does Jesus say in vs. 50? "But Jesus on hearing this answered him, 'Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.'" There's a lot working against Jairus' faith right now, isn't there? Two obvious obstacles. First, the facts. She died. She passed. It sounds too late to me! Why keep going? I bet there have been plenty of times you've said that same thing to yourself, "Why keep going? Why keep believing?" Because our God raises the dead, that's why. Secondly, Jairus is experiencing the pressure from people. Look at vs. 52-53 (READ). Throughout this passage, people are seen as obstacles to faith. First, the crowd is pressing in on Jesus, choking him off from those in need. Now, people laugh and mock the news that Jesus brings. Friends, this is a very helpful reminder to us: if you are going to have authentic faith in Jesus you better be prepared to press through the obstacles that others put in your way.

What's the key? You have to give greater weight and be more firmly convinced in the words of Jesus than the words and messages from others. We don't know exactly what this woman knew of Jesus or believed. Certainly, Jesus' fame was well-known; he healed people of their diseases and made people clean. There are theories about what this woman may have known about Jesus or what she believed from the OT, but that's all speculation. But what we do know is that she believed in something strongly enough to risk further shame and push through all the obstacles to touch Jesus. Jesus encourages Jairus to press through, too. But in his case, Jesus told him, "Believe and she will be well." The people laughed at that message. So, Jairus had decision to make, didn't he? Believe the words of Jesus or believe what everybody else is telling me. Thankfully, both Jairus and woman give us a great picture of faith and press through the obstacles to see the work of Jesus in their life.

Friends, the message of this sermon is not *you will get what you want, too, if you believe hard enough*. I'm somewhat concerned that's what some of you might think. No, James 4 makes it abundantly clear that some of us don't have what we have asked for from God because our motives are wrong. So, it doesn't matter how much we ask and how long we wait God will not give us what we want because what we want isn't what's best for us. The message of this sermon, the point of this passage, is that there's a tenacity to faith. True faith is earnest; it doesn't stop even in the face of fearful situations.

You know, we never really know what we will do in those situations until those fearful moments find us. But that doesn't mean we can't prepare for those days; in fact, I think we should prepare for those days. We should ask, "What do I want to do when I lose my job? When my child gets sick? When my family unexpectedly falls apart? How can I make sure that I don't give into fear? How can I prepare myself to trust in God when my bad day comes?" We can prepare our heart and soul for those days. Here's how we can do that.

First of all, prize Christ now above all things and tell yourself to prize Christ above all things when your bad day comes. Here's the deal, when what you desire on this earth is threatened, you're going to be tempted to prize it more... in fact, prize it the most because you're afraid of losing it. But when you prize your treasure more than Christ, you'll let go of Christ to keep holding onto your treasure. So, pray right now earnestly for Christ to be your prize. Pray earnestly that when that day comes you still prize Christ. That will be your anchor, brothers and sisters, in the storm.

Secondly, and very much connected to that, loosen your grip on the things of earth. Right now do that. Because here's the deal; if you can't or won't do that now, you certainly won't do that in the storm when you're afraid. Because the things of the earth have been your life preserver all these years. You won't give up on it when the storm comes. So, loosen your grip now.

Finally, live with a sense of readiness for that day. We're very tempted to live like we're never going to through a trial. That's not very wise. We should count on going through fearful times. We should expect the same kinds of dreadful situations we've been reading about. Storms that fill our boat with water. Demonic activity that looks to destroy our lives. Sickness and disease that threaten our well-being. And as we anticipate those days coming, we start arming ourselves with the truth and grace of Christ to remain steadfast in our faithful and fruitful in our work no matter what.

In it all, my brothers and sisters, Jesus is greater. He is of greater consequence than storms, than the demonic and even sickness and death. But while he's fearful, he's also good. So, seek him with all your heart; don't stop. Keep pressing and don't let Jesus get choked out of your life.

Key Verse: Luke 8:49

Questions for the week

- In what ways can you relate to the woman in our passage today or Jairus? What has tempted you to have fear?
- What were the examples of faith by the woman and Jairus that you'd like to imitate?
- What tempts you to stop seeking Jesus with all your heart?