

## Sermon for Proper 8 Year B

### Living Without Fear

BY KATERINA K. WHITLEY

[2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27](#); [Psalm 130](#); [2 Corinthians 8:7-15](#); [Mark 5:21-43](#)

Today's readings reinforce for us the undeniable reality that suffering is not unique to us or to our times, and that we know very little about the ultimate meaning of death. Wars, hunger, economic disasters abound and bring us to despair; personal illness, pain, and loss in our families cause us to lose hope. Sometimes we feel as if we are alone in our pain; we ask, Why me?

And then we read of David's immense sorrow at the death of his friend Jonathan; we read of Paul's urgent call for help for the starving in Jerusalem, and hear Jairus' cry, "O Jesus come touch my daughter so she may be healed," and we recognize that we live in a world that has always contained profound tragedy and that our experiences are not unique. We also are reminded that despite much suffering and destruction, plagues, and starvation, human beings continue to survive and to multiply.

This kind of endurance gives us hope in a world where the predictors of doom arrive in every generation to howl in apocalyptic fear. Some do so out of a tragic misunderstanding of Scripture; others because it suits their purposes, or because of idolatry. It is with astonishment that people of faith hear that 2012 was predicted as the year for the destruction of the world, and that there are youngsters and even adults among us who are terribly afraid because of such predictions; they listen to those who have no faith in a loving God, and not having been taught the truth, allow fear to rob them of hope.

Listen to the contrast in the words of the psalmist:

I wait for the Lord, my soul  
waits,  
and in his word I hope;  
my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for  
the morning,  
more than those who watch for  
the morning.

This is the balanced perspective and focus of a person of faith: wait on the Lord. Living and faith both require patience – wait on the Lord. Fear is the result of having no one greater than ourselves to look to. Waiting on the Lord takes away fear.

St. Paul adds another dimension to this waiting – acting in faith. Despite his apparent conviction that the Lord Jesus would return soon, Paul does not hesitate to look after the living. In his great effort to feed the starving in Jerusalem, he is not hesitant to ask for help from all those he had brought to Christ. He is not one to say, "Ignore the poor, ignore the hungry, because soon we all will be taken up." He knows that life is a gift of God, that it is good, and that the bodies of children and adults must be fed. St. Paul knows what matters because he compares everything to the ultimate gift instead of to apocalyptic fears: "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."

Listening to Paul helps things fall into place, helps us achieve a mental and spiritual balance when we focus on the redemptive work of God through Jesus Christ.

And finally, let us look at Jesus. His two encounters in today's story, one with a sick woman and the other with a dying girl in Capernaum came at a time when Jesus was at his most popular. Hundreds of people followed him wherever he went. The scene is riveting.

He has just arrived by boat and is immediately surrounded by people who are in need of hearing words of hope, by those who are sick and need to be healed, and by the curious. A man, obviously important in his city and synagogue, runs to him, falls on his knees and begs for the life of his child. Jesus does not hesitate. He leaves the crowds to go with this father in need. But as they walk quickly together through the curious and the adoring, a stooped woman approaches and touches his cloak. Not a big deal. He is surrounded by so many people that she is sure no one will notice; she is convinced that the touch will heal her, and it does. Simple enough.

What is unusual about this story is that Jesus stops and asks, "Who touched my clothes?" When the disciples express amusement and surprise at his question, another reporter of this story tells us that Jesus responded that he felt power going out of him. What a remarkable reaction.

There was something in the woman's immense faith, a total conviction that after years of suffering, she had found the cure in the person of Jesus, and the energy of that faith was more powerful than all the shoving and pulling of the crowd. One touch of utter faith calls forth the creative power of the divine, and healing occurs.

And all this happens very quickly, while Jesus is rushing to meet another person's need. The connection of Jesus to the source of life and love, to the one he called Father, is so intense and unbroken that it is like electricity: Jairus plugs into it and receives hope, and the woman plugs into it and receives healing. Nothing else matters and nothing interferes with Jesus' purpose. Fame does not distract him, physical exhaustion does not hinder him, and the clamoring of the crowd with its multitude of desires is shut out. Two people with specific needs have reached out to him and he knows that he can help them. He does.

In the following scene in the little girl's room, death has already arrived and the professional mourners have gathered. There is probably a great deal of discussion and questioning going on. Why is Jairus still bringing Jesus to the house when he has been informed that his child is dead? What good can the healer do now? Why doesn't he leave the man alone? Jairus needs to concentrate on his family now; the time for proper mourning has come.

But Jesus turns it all upside down, as he is known to do. He turns to the sad father and says the words that we all need to hear over and over again, "Do not fear. Only believe." So Jairus continues to lead him to his house, which is overflowing with crying neighbors. Jesus' words shock them. "The child is not dead but sleeping," he tells them. Instead of asking, "What does he know that we don't know about death?" they laugh at him. He seems to be the only one who is free from the terrible bondage of fear; over and over again he commands all who follow him not to be afraid.

There is so much fear in this country and in the world today: fear of "the other," fear of losing a job and not being able to pay the mortgage, fear of crazy people with guns, fear of not succeeding, oh, so many fears. How do we confront them?

The psalmist's answer is to wait on the Lord; St. Paul's answer is to remember what Jesus did for us; and Jesus' answer is to be whole. This wholeness, "holiness" in theological terms, is possible only when we are focused on the one who brought us to new life with a trust so complete that it takes away fear, even fear of death.

"Who touched my clothes?" And we fall on our knees and confess, "We touched you, Lord, for we are afraid." And then he says to us, "Your faith has made you well, healed of the evil that swirls around

you, free of the fear that is being proclaimed in the public square, released from the need to squander your energies in things that do not matter.”

So, healed like the woman who had been sick for many years, brought to new life like the daughter of Jairus, we get up from our knees, listen when he has says, “Give her something to eat,” and approach his table in gratitude, free from fear.

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