

In the name of God, and of God's Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In today's Gospel, Mark gives us another lively, active scene from Jesus' ministry. Jesus has been criss-crossing the sea of Galilee, healing people, casting out demons, and even calming a storm that blew up while they were still on the water. This morning, he lands on another shore of the sea of Galilee and is faced, once again, with a great crowd. The fame of Jesus' gifts of healing have spread far and wide; this crowd gathers in excitement and in hope and in expectation that Jesus coming among them will be life-changing.

In this scene from Mark, we first meet Jairus. Jairus is a leader of the synagogue; he has a place within his society that demands some respectful regard, some deference. When Jairus comes among that great crowd, we can imagine that people make way for Jairus. Jairus can command space within this crowd; in recognition of his status, Jairus probably expects that people will accommodate him; so when Jairus sees Jesus, the crowd parts, so that Jairus can move forward directly to Jesus in order to fall at his feet.

Then we meet this anonymous woman, a woman gripped by great physical debilitation. She can have no expectation that anyone will make way for her. She will be unrecognized, and shown no deference; she knows this, so instead of going right up to Jesus and falling at his feet with her request, she squeezes through the crowd, out of sight, unremarked, and only allows herself the hope of being able to touch the edge of Jesus' garment.

Here is the marvelous thing: Jesus works hard to fully engage both Jairus and this unnamed woman. Their social standing, their expectations, make no difference at all in how Jesus perceives their presence with him. How society has treated Jairus and this woman, and how society sees them makes no difference as to whether Jesus responds to them.

Jesus wants to know who touched him; Jesus wants to meet face-to-face with whoever had such faith that they believed that only touching Jesus' clothes would give them the healing they desired. And so Jesus comes to a complete stop in his journey on behalf of Jairus. Jesus searches and asks until this woman comes to him and tells him the whole truth of her suffering, her need, and her faith. She, like Jairus, falls down before Jesus' feet; not because anyone knew her and ushered her toward him, or had the

expectation that she should be the first to see this healing rabbi as soon as he landed onshore; she falls down before Jesus feet because the relationship between Jesus and those who follow him is one of mutual searching. As the woman reached out, Jesus reached back. Jesus didn't keep on walking and tell a disciple to stay behind and ask around to find out who touched him, because Jesus had business on behalf of the leader of the synagogue. Jesus stopped everything so that the woman who searched him out in her faith could fall before him and hear Jesus' healing words with her own ears.

I wonder what Jairus thought of all this; as a leader of the synagogue he might have thought Jesus wasn't showing the proper deference to him. I think it more likely that Jairus simply felt his distress and fear grow over the wellbeing of his daughter, as Jesus wasted precious minutes looking around for someone who had intended to remain unseen. Jairus needed Jesus to act for his daughter; Jairus didn't need Jesus to be distracted by anything else; Jairus probably wondered if Jesus cared enough about his daughter to really do anything. And then comes the devastating news that it is too late. Leave this rabbi alone, the people from Jairus' household say; Jesus has been distracted by this woman in the crowd, and there's no need

to keep bothering someone who won't make haste to help in a time of dire need.

And yet. Jesus is not limited by time; he can stop to speak words of recognition and healing to this woman whose name we never learn, knowing that all will be well. Jesus is not limited by death; Jesus turns to those of Jairus' household and says that God is with us - Immanuel - and they need not fear; all will be well. The people at Jairus' house go from wailing to derisive laughter; but scoffing and unbelief do not deter Jesus any more than death does. Jesus reaches out and tells the little one to get up; and she does. And then in a beautiful acknowledgement of the kind of emotional upheaval the day's events would have left this household in, Jesus gives them practical, tender advice: make sure the little girl gets something to eat.

I wonder how Jairus and this woman thought about themselves after their encounter with Jesus. They both would have seen with their own eyes and felt in their own bodies that what the world thought of them meant nothing to God. It didn't matter that the crowd would make way for Jairus in deference to his status as leader of the synagogue. It didn't matter that the

woman had to make her own way and hope just to touch the edge of Jesus' garment. God reached out in healing to both, because they both reached out to God. They were both made whole because they were both beloved; they received grace upon grace, because grace is not limited by time, or even death. God was among them in the presence of Jesus reaching out to them as they reached out to God; and social status crumbled before him.

For the lowly to be lifted up, and the high to be brought low is an upheaval; but it is also a gift of abundant grace. To let go the dependence on how the world sees us, to let go the false sense of self that our place in society gives us can free us to be who and what we are in the presence of God alone: beloved, whole, healed. Brought low and lifted up. Wherever we find ourselves in this crowded world, whether we are the ones for whom the crowd will part and make way for us, or whether we are the ones who feel alone and that we must make a way for ourselves, let us rest in this unshakeable truth: God is with us; God knows and sees us through the eyes and with the heart of a loving parent; and however we reach out to God, God will reach back. Amen.