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Trinity Lutheran Church of Las Cruces
July 1, 2018 Pentecost 6

COURAGE TO CONNECT
Lamentations 3:22-33
Psalm 30

Mark 5:21-43

I heard a story this week:

A man, down on his luck, went into a church we'll call it "First Lutheran Church" - a big church, thick new carpet, super lighting system, a church which catered to the "well to do" (you know the kind of church I mean?)

A deacon eyed the man's wrinkled old clothes.

Concerned about First Church's image, the deacon went to the man and asked "*Uh, Can we help you... ?*"

The man said, "*I was praying and the Lord told me to come to this church.*"

The deacon thought quickly and said,

"maybe you should go pray some more... you might get a different answer about which church to go to."

The next Sunday the man didn't return. But later that week, the deacon ran into him on Main Street. The deacon couldn't resist, asking,

"So, did you pray & get a different answer for a church that might be a better fit for you?"

The man replied, "*Yes I did. I told the Lord that they don't seem to want me at First Church and the Lord said, 'Don't worry about it son; I've been trying to get into that church for years and haven't made it yet.'*"

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ at Trinity Lutheran Church of Las Cruces, today in the Gospel of Mark

We see Jesus – the son of God – walking around on this earth, and he loves & he touches & he heals the rich...

& he loves & he touches and he heals the poor,

& we can know that Jesus loves & touches and heals each of us, who are somewhere in between.

And what's more, today we see in the human Jesus, walking around on this earth, God connects us with one another – as daughters and sons of the Most High God.

The Church is not like a club – remember the famous quote from Groucho Marx, who once said:

“I don't want to belong to any club that would have me as a member.”

Christ's Church is the opposite of that. There's no dues – yes there's stewardship and offerings and generous sharing, but no dues. No minimum entry requirements. Just the courage to reach out and be connected, connected in loving God, in loving our neighbour.

So, today in Mark chapter 5, we again see Jesus – he and the disciples have returned from that bumpy boat ride Pastor Wayne preached about last week,

And now Jesus and his disciples are walking on dry ground again, and there's a crowd pressing in on them, they've been hearing about this Jesus, & people of all kinds want to know more...

And then a middle aged man comes over... the kind of guy everybody knows his name: That's Jairus, he's the president of the synagogue, he's well to do, well educated, If you could have googled him, he'd have a long list of accomplishments.

Oh God, but his daughter is sick, and what use is all your success and prestige and learning when your 12 year kid is sick, dying. And even though Jairus probably was sceptical about this roving preacher Jesus,

Oh God when the apple of your eye is fading away in front of you, you go out as a last resort, and do exactly what Jairus did here in Mark 5:

Jairus throws himself down at Jesus' feet (that's what you did in those days, to show you are serious. You are giving this moment your all. You need to connect...)

She's twelve years old. On the cusp of woman hood... "My little girl", says Jairus. You dads may know what that is like. My little daughter. Twelve years old. She still thinks Dad's great. It's not going to last much longer. He sees men are beginning to notice her... he's so protective. And then, and then, it's not the looming threat of dating that's going to carry her away, she's sick; she's at the point of death.

Jesus, will you come put your healing hands on her?

So Jesus goes with Jairus,

There's hope.

But it's not smooth sailing. There's still this crowd. Pressing in. And here's another character who shows up... another probably middle – aged person... a woman who's been bleeding with a [*grimace*] woman's sickness. For twelve years. And this woman's a nobody. Nobody knows *her* name. She's probably nobody's mother, nobody's wife, nobody to go to Jesus to drop at his feet *for her*. She's not the apple of anybody's eye. Technically, according to the law, she's not supposed to be out in the crowd at all, much LESS touch a holy man! Inappropriate and illegal (Leviticus 15 goes into the details if you care to look it up)!

And the woman either is too uneducated to know that, or she is too desperate or too hopeful to care. So she follows Jesus, and when she thinks nobody will notice she reaches out and touches just his robe.

OH MY GOD.

The worst thing of all and the best thing of all happens.

Jesus stops in his tracks.

Who touched me? He asks. He wants... to see her, face to face. Connect with her. This is why Jesus the Son of God came to earth, not to heal from afar [with some spiritual gamma-rays], but to connect. Person to person.

Some say there are two parts to this woman's faith & courage,

One) she had faith to reach out and touch Jesus.

Two, maybe the greater act of faith, is that

when Jesus stopped, and asked, *Who touched me?* she came forward. *I will be known by God.* She trusted Jesus not to make a spectacle of her or to shame her...

She trusted, he would lift her up, and not bring her down.

People of Trinity Lutheran church, Las Cruces, we have a personal God who wants to know us, and wants us to know each other.

She, who was no one's daughter, is now called *daughter* by Jesus who was probably – humanly speaking, younger than she was... it's okay. In the mystical kingdom of God, age doesn't matter. In God's eyes this woman, is a precious daughter, on the cusp of full womanhood. Finally ready to stand, free of her illness.

There are those who say pride is the biggest sin. And the cure for that is healthy humility.

BUT [as Anna Madsen writes in the Summer 2018 Gather Bible Study on Prayer which we are doing this summer at Trinity]

for some people, maybe especially women of a certain age or a certain upbringing, (but not only women!) ... it might be the opposite - the root of sinfulness may be *too much* humility, and the cure is healthy pride.

The sin of too much pride shows up as greed and will-to-power and violence, whereas the sin of too much humility shows itself in apathy, triviality, passive-aggressiveness and gossip, a low-grade infectious fever of unhappiness.

But this woman, comes forward: *I'm the one who touched you. I needed healing; I took what I needed.* And Jesus called her action: "healing faith".

Only now does the attention of the biblical story go back to Jairus, and his daughter.

And yes, Jairus' daughter, this poor little rich girl, she too is healed. From death itself.

In Hartland Wisconsin, where Wayne & I were pastors, we used to say in our mission statement, that God calls church members to

“SERVICE ADVENTURES WITH THE POOR AND POOR IN SPIRIT.”

There is nothing poorer than a parent at risk of losing his child. And there is no one richer than a person for whom God has turned tears to dancing.

In this congregation, we are a mixture of rich and poor, hurting, and healthy, too proud, or too humble. And those roles can change at the drop of a hat, with the results of a medical test, with a phone call in the night. But Jesus walks with us. And today again he comes among us to touch and to heal and to change us. In confession and absolution. In word and prayer, in bread and wine.

Trinity Lutheran church of Las Cruces - we are so happy about new members!!!
Whether rich or poor or everything in between,

Let's learn each other's names.

Let's receive joy & healing together, in regular worship and Sunday fellowship.

Let's exercise the courage to reach out and be connected, in loving God, in loving our neighbour.

Amen.
