

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

January 24, 2016

“Distractions and Desperation”

Encountering Christ, part 4

Luke 8:40-56

You are in the right place this morning. I don't know what it took for you to get here today – snowplowing, shoveling, jumping the car battery, or maybe three cups of coffee – but the fact remains, you are here, and we are grateful. Take a look around you this morning. We are here to worship God with you today. And I'll let you in on a secret. We are not perfect. I know! It's a scandal. But if you came into this place this morning, thinking, “Wow, this church must be full of super-Christians. These people have it all together!” ...let me be the first to say, “I'm sorry.” We are broken people. We make mistakes. We don't always get it right. But what we have learned is that God takes our humble offerings and turns them into something incredible. Us, perfect? Goodness, no. We are desperately in need of a Savior. We need Jesus.

I invite you to pray with me this morning with your hands extended and palms open, ready to receive what God has for us today. Let's pray.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us. Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Show us in these moments how desperately we need you. Help us to listen and trust you. Thank you for your love for us. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Throughout January we have been examining stories of people in the Gospels who encountered Jesus and had their lives radically changed. My premise is, if you have met Jesus, you will be different. Your thoughts, your actions, your heart will change when you know this God-man, Jesus.

We talked about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, how Jesus came in their darkest times, right after the crucifixion, when hope was lost and their expectations were left unfulfilled. Jesus opened the scriptures to them and left their hearts burning for more. They ran back to tell their friends the good news, that Jesus was alive. Next, we met the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar. She was an outcast, ashamed, hiding from the community by going to the well for water only in the hottest part of the day. She met Jesus and discovered living water. She learned that Jesus is the Messiah, and she learned to worship God in spirit and truth. Last week, we heard the story of Saul in Damascus – the rebel, the murderer who found grace, whose eyes were opened to see who Christ really was. Saul became the Apostle Paul, whose missionary adventures and writings changed the world. Each encounter with Jesus changed their lives and showed us that no one is excluded, no one is too far from help and grace, if they just believe in Christ. *(pause)*

Have you ever felt desperate? I am not talking about the week before prom, when you are desperate to find a date. OK, when I was a teenager, that felt like desperation to me. But as an adult, I've had much worse times. For instance, when my daughter Emily was two years old, and she got the stomach flu. You don't know desperation until your child is sick and vomiting as you hold her in the rocking chair at 2 AM.

As a parent, you hate seeing your child injured or sick. And the worse part was, there really was nothing I could do except hold her and the bowl. I sat there, praying for God to help her and trusting that the bug would run its course. Ugh, what a terrible moment for us!

There was another time, actually when I was in college, when I had a similar, but even scarier moment of desperation. My family was visiting, and my dad got food poisoning after eating breakfast. We were at my fraternity house, with the newly installed carpet, and my dad threw up on it. (Ah, the irony.) He was incoherent – he couldn't respond at all when we asked, "Are you all right?" I panicked. I ran next door to the health clinic to find a doctor. At first I didn't find anyone, so I picked up a phone and called 911, and then when I saw a nurse coming down the hall, I hung up. She said no one was on call at the clinic, so I ran back outside, when a police car pulled up. Fortunately, the officer was much calmer than me. He took one look at my dad and called for an ambulance, and after a few hours in the emergency room, my dad was well enough to make the long trip home.

I hate being in those types of situations. I'll bet you do, as well. We all feel desperation from time to time, if we are honest. Especially when we are sick, or someone we love is ill. My question is, where do we look for answers? Where do we run for help? People can access all kinds of information these days. We can look up a home remedy on the internet, for anything from hiccups to cancer. We might look to money, our friends, or even self-medication through alcohol or worse. Whether we fight a physical illness or a spiritual battle, many people will try anything to be healed, instead of going to Jesus Christ.

The story we read today in Luke 8 reveals two people who were desperate for healing; the synagogue ruler, Jairus, and an unnamed woman, who was suffering from 12 years of chronic bleeding. Their stories intersected in Galilee, where they were looking for a miracle from this rabbi, Jesus.

Consider what each one was going through, and why they were so desperate. Jairus was a ruler. His only daughter, his twelve year-old “baby girl”, was deathly ill. Jairus left her bedside even as she was dying, desperate to find Jesus somewhere in Galilee. Imagine his anguish – not knowing exactly where to find Jesus. It’s not like he could just call him on the cell phone. CNN was not following Jesus with a camera crew, reporting his location. But Jairus knew if he stayed with his daughter, she wouldn’t get better. Think about that for a moment. How desperate would you have to be to leave your child if they were dying? Why not send someone else? I’ll tell you why: Jairus was so desperate for his daughter to be healed, he took matters into his own hands. He went and found Jesus.

But someone else was looking for Jesus, too. The woman in the crowd was desperate for her own healing. The bible says she was sick for twelve years. Imagine that. Twelve years of searching for answers. Twelve years of trying local remedies. Twelve years of going to “physicians,” who had limited medical knowledge. She had spent all she had on cures that didn’t work.

Did you notice how afraid she was? She didn’t want to take the time to ask Jesus to heal her. She just wanted to touch his clothes, be healed, and then run away. There is something you might not realize about her. The Old Testament laws said she was “unclean” because of her bleeding. Until she could stop it for seven straight days, she wouldn’t be allowed in the temple to worship, wouldn’t be allowed in the community, wouldn’t be allowed to touch anything. (See Leviticus 15:25-28.) She was an outcast, an untouchable, and she contaminated everything and everyone she touched. How lonely would that be?

So imagine this moment. The crowd is excited, they are jostling with each other. Everyone wants to see Jesus. Jairus is frantic. He wants Jesus to hurry. And this woman, with her dreadful condition, is trying to get close enough to touch Jesus' cloak.

She reaches out her hand. Nobody is really looking at her. All eyes are on Jesus and Jairus. And she touches his cloak. And suddenly she knows she is healed. She starts to sneak away.

Jesus stopped abruptly. "Who touched me?" That's kind of a weird question, isn't it? First of all, everybody was touching Jesus! Second, if he knew that someone touched him and was healed, shouldn't he divinely know who it was? Why bother asking?

I think he did this for the woman's sake. He wanted her to come out of hiding. He wanted her to know, her faith had made her well. It's not enough to just touch Jesus. We don't need just a "little Jesus." We need to fully embrace him. I know it's not in the bible, but I have to believe, Jesus gave her a hug. Even if he didn't, Jesus commended her for her faith.

That's all well and good, but what about Jairus? Can you see him standing there the whole time, watching, knowing time was short? Jairus was not rude to the woman, but the wait had to be killing him. Like standing in line at the pharmacy or the ER, when the person in front of you has an equally critical condition. Jairus was thinking, "Come on, hurry up people!"

His desperation was compounded by distraction. And the next thing you know, it was too late. Word came: "Your daughter has already died. Don't bother the Master anymore." Maybe Jairus was foolish to begin with, coming to Jesus so late in his daughter's illness. How much time had passed since he'd left the

house? Could his daughter have been saved if this woman had not gotten in the way, if this crowd hadn't pressed in on them? Can you imagine the doubts, the guilt that crept into his mind? How his head lowered? How tears filled his eyes?

And then Jesus said those powerful words: "Don't be afraid. Just believe."

This is where God's Word clashes with our own reasoning. "Don't be afraid"? "Just believe"? But there are so many excuses we can make. "But I am afraid." "But it's too late." "But it's impossible."

We all have a choice to believe. To believe Jesus will heal. To believe Jesus will save. I'm talking about BEFORE you have evidence. In the midst of the suffering. The fact is, not even Jairus' family believed. Jesus told them, "The girl is sleeping," and they all laughed. They ridiculed Christ for claiming he had miraculous power. And look what happened: Only the parents and three disciples were allowed to witness the miracle of this little girl returning to life. Why? Because they believed. They were desperate, and they believed.

The truth is, we don't come to Jesus if we aren't desperate. We won't come to him if we don't believe that his power is greater than anything we will ever face. We can't just casually touch Jesus. We can't say, "Well, I'll try this and that, and then, if nothing else works, I'll add a little Jesus as well." It doesn't work that way. It's all or nothing. If we are going to be healed, if we are going to be saved, we need to fully embrace Jesus. We must believe like our lives depend on him.

I've had many times in my life when my desperation drove me to embrace the fact that only Jesus could save me. Like when my parents' marriage seemed hopeless. When I was depressed in school. When I was unemployed and questioning if God even wanted me as a minister. And in each and every

situation, I found, at my deepest, darkest, most hopeless times, Jesus came through for me. “Don’t be afraid. Just believe.”

The woman’s bleeding stopped. The little girl’s spirit returned. New life returned. Hope returned. In their desperation, these people came to Jesus, and Jesus came through for them.

So what about you? Do you believe that Jesus can heal you and your loved ones? Not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well? We are all “sin-sick.” We all need healing. But are we desperate enough to reach out to him? Will we fully embrace Jesus?

We only come to Jesus when we are desperate. If we think we don’t need him, we won’t ask him to come into our lives and heal us.

God created us to be with him. But we are all broken, we are all sick in some way, physically and relationally. God knows. God saw our hopeless condition, and he did something about it. He sent his son, Jesus, to enter into our world, to bear the burden of all our sickness and sin on the cross, where he died. And Christ rose again, overcoming death, healing us, loving us. He calls out to each one of us. “Don’t be afraid. Just believe.” Believe that he loves you. Believe that he can rescue you. Believe that he can heal you. Believe that eternal life is waiting for us the moment we say, “YES!” to him.

I’m desperate for Jesus. And I’m desperate for a church that is desperate for Jesus. Our youth in confirmation, they are desperate for a church filled with desperate disciples who put their whole trust in Jesus. Our new member class is learning to be desperate for the things of God. Our community is desperate for healing, for wholeness, for Jesus. They might not even know that Jesus is here, ready to receive them. It’s up to us to tell them. If we draw close enough to

Jesus, he will change our lives. We need to become desperate and find out that our desperation is exactly what Jesus needs to show us his glory.

Let's pray.

Memory verse

Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." - Mark 5:36 (NIV)

Reflection questions

1. What constitutes a "desperate moment" for you? Have you had many of them in your life? Which one was the most memorable for you?
2. If your child was deathly ill, how far would you go to help them? Would you leave their side if you thought you could find help?
3. Have you ever blamed someone else for failing to help you in time?
4. What is one thing you wish Jesus would do in your life? ...in the life of someone you know? Will you pray for this to happen?