

Sermon for Sunday, June 28, 2009

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson	2 Samuel 1:1,7-27
Psalm	130
Second Lesson	2 Corinthians 8:7-15
Gospel	Mark 5:21-43

Today's gospel lesson is a lesson that's both rich and touching—a lesson that brings us hope and healing in the midst of uncertainty and death and leads us along the path of our own faith journeys.

A synagogue official, Jairus, pleads with Jesus to heal his daughter, and Jesus simply “went with him” (and, along the way, had time graciously to acknowledge the cure of a woman whose own faith had worked as a saving wonder). While they're on their way, Jairus is told with brutal directness that his daughter is dead, so he need not trouble the teacher any longer. How ordinary, how like us in their reaction: we know the limits of God, we know exactly what to expect, don't we? Healing, yes; “raising up,” impossible! Certain small adjustments, some small changes, yes; but real change? A real turning around—hatred to tolerance to love? Impossible! A real conversion from one kind of life to another? Impossible! We can't believe that the fame or infamy already marking a person can be turned around.

Jesus ignores their message and turns to the grieving father: “Do not fear, only believe.” Do not close the door and windows to new possibilities; believe that new possibilities are not only possible, but attainable through God—a new way of being and doing and acting and seeing.

Those who cared about Jairus' daughter and those who were sincere followers of Jesus were open to new facts, or at least tried to be—they were open to new experiences, a new way of life, they were open to imagine the unimaginable; the resurrection. Jesus didn't command or cry out in a loud voice, but simply took the child by the hand and said, “Arise”—and she did.

What does this story tell us about Jesus, about the mystery of Jesus? That he cared for people, that he went out of his way to give his help to those who asked

for it. That he stood up to ridicule and hate and went on about his business of caring for others. That, being human, he had a definite human touch. Jesus was—and is—no distant, cool character. He touched, he lifted up, he arranged to feed a hungry child. These miracles stories may cause problems in our scientific world; we may, in fact, interpret many of these cures as psychosomatic illnesses and cures.

No matter.

What matters is the insight we gain into the mystery of Jesus and his ministry, and so into the reality of our lives as his followers. He was a healer, a giver of hope and new life. He was open to the needs and pain of others, and he cared about them enough to actually do something. And in the gospels we learn that his was not a pious do-goodism, but a caring and curing intended to open people's eyes to the reality of God, to unheard-of possibilities made possible of realization through faith in Jesus.

In our Christian community there is a concern for sharing, for are we not all the Body of Christ? In the gospel lesson for today, we have seen Jesus giving freely of himself and of his caring concern for anyone in need. Yet, as this and other gospel lessons indicate, Jesus also challenged those who had boxed and bottled God in their own image, refusing to give into their negativity and shortsightedness.

We are asked to gather together in caring concern for one another, and not out of our own needs for control. We are asked to be raised up from our own death. We gather together today as those graced, favored by God: we rejoice and give thanks for that grace as we join in the Eucharist. And we renew our will to believe in the impossible, and that we are all vehicles of the impossible: that, working through us, God can accomplish everything.

But only if we let God. ...

Amen. ...