

Sermon for Vespers Tuesday of Pentecost 22 — Yr A

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Text: Luke 8:40-563

I think I can safely assume that all in this illustrious group are familiar with the exegesis of these two miracles that come to us intertwined in the tradition: The healing of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the unending period.

There is an awkwardness to the whole situation. On the one hand this text honors the Law and its observance. Jairus would not have become a ruler of the synagogue had he not been known for his piety. The fact that our Lord's garment had fringes for the woman to touch identifies him as an observant Jew.

Yet our Lord at the same time violates some of the most basic principles of the Law. He blesses the woman who touched him, when he should have condemned her for requiring him to go through elaborate cleansing rituals. And he proceeded to aggravate his uncleanness by taking the dead girl by the hand.

There is no indication in the text that our Lord felt the need to do what the Law required for cleansing. Instead, His touch made clean what was polluted and made alive one who was dead.

Our Senior reminds us that as a Society we exist on the margins of the Church. Often that is an awkward position to be in, as we discovered at our General Retreat last year. We are committed to help one another be faithful to our ordination vows and live within the discipline we promised. Yet sometimes our deep-seated convictions and the policies of our church bodies create conflicts.

This week we focus on Confession and Communion under the cross.

Confession clearly happens on the margins. We come clean to another human being and admit that we are not who we should be, just as that woman tremblingly admitted she had made the Lord unclean to meet her needs.

Communion under the cross is also a marginal action in a culture inspired by Oprah. Our Lord comes to us physically to touch us and give us life — over against the whole message of our society which is about feelings, experiences, and moralisms, not about the Word that comes from outside and touches us through ordinary food and drink.

The laughter our Lord endured as he entered Jairus' house should disabuse us of any expectation that our ministries on the margins will give us status, popularity, or security.

Most of us are not going to serve large, well-endowed congregations. My chapter dean assures me that I am living at the end of the world in Lock Haven, and certainly you can see it from there. Yet if our call is to ministry at the margins, it is in Galilee that we will find our Lord at work and not in Jerusalem or Rome.

There on the margins our Lord touches us and touches his people through us. We can either cringe in fear from the uncleanness that we encounter, or we can trust that the Lord's touch brings cleansing and life where there is corruption and death.

Most of us will not experience the sort of dramatic miracle today's Gospel describes. That too is part of life on the margins. The healing touch of Christ is received by faith, not by sight.

As we confess, we are asked whether we believe that we are hearing Christ, even though the voice that vibrates our eardrums is that of a sinful, broken pastor. The bread and the wine are made by members or purchased from a vendor, yet we trust the Promise that through them the Lord enters our bodies with life-giving power.

This is why our ministry is always under the cross.

The Apostle taught that we have the treasure of grace in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. Some wag said that makes us crackpots for Christ — an image that can shake our pretensions.

The cross remains a scandal. Some in our church bodies exchange the Gospel for a utopian vision of a new social order, while others believe that by entertaining the crowd we should cobble together huge congregations.

There is a place for public witness, and there is a place for outreach to the unchurched. But always under the cross. Always realizing that Christ is found at the margins, in Galilee, among those whose corruption and weakness endanger our careers and our piety.

Our security is not in external signs or evidence. Confession and Communion under the cross occur at the margins and drive us to the margins.

As a Society, our call is not to succeed by worldly standards, not to become rich and famous, but to be faithful to our Lord, knowing that healing and life are found in His touch under the cross.

Society of the Holy Trinity

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