

Talitha

My message today is titled “Talitha” for two reasons. The first reason comes from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 5, verses 25-43:

“Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, ‘If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.’ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ And his disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, “Who touched me?”’ He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.’

“While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?’ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, ‘Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.’ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha cum’, which means, ‘Little girl, get up!’ And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.”

When Jesus says, “Talitha cum,” he is saying “Little girl, come,” or in today’s language, “Get up, girl.” The second reason I titled my sermon after this Scripture is because of an organization I learned about in 2017 from Cathy Morling, someone who became a good friend of mine in the UK. Elizabeth and I got to know Tony and Cathy Morling back then as a result of a pulpit exchange. Tony is a pastor on Jersey Island, which is one of the Channel Islands that belongs to Britain. We were blessed to be able to get to know him and his wife first on our own trip to Jersey Island, and then when they came to North Carolina for 6 weeks. They and their sons Columba and Ronan are the perfect English family - it was a true joy getting to know them!



Between Tony and Cathy, it's Cathy who is the famous one. She is an actress and goes by her stage name, Cathy Sara. If you are a fan of the BBC/PBS series "Downton Abbey," you may know her as Mrs. Drake from seasons 1-2. The picture below was taken on set:

This is not the best picture of Cathy, as she looks so dour and disapproving. Here's a picture of my



friend the way most people see her - she has a great smile!

Both Tony and Cathy work in ministry in their own way: Tony as a Methodist pastor and Cathy through an organization called Talitha. This non-profit was started by a group of actors in the UK to use art therapy as a means of helping women who had suffered intense trauma in their lives. Their mission as stated on their website is: "Talitha Arts is a UK charity that delivers training and therapeutic arts workshops to those who have experienced trauma, abuse, violence, homelessness, refugees and victims of human trafficking, restoring dignity, hope and worth." Women who are served by Talitha International are able to find value in their lives and healing from the suffering they have endured.

Healing is the restoration to community. Today's Scripture has two stories of healing. The first is the woman with a hemorrhage. Purity laws would prohibit someone like this woman who can't stop bleeding from participating in her society, including going to temple on the Sabbath. The religious authorities would look to Leviticus and Exodus and declare her "unclean." She would be considered an abomination to her community; the keepers of the law would demand that no one touch her or be touched by her if they wanted to remain "ritually clean." She was to have no physical contact with anyone at all.

Think about what she risked in touching Jesus. He was a rabbi, too - what if he scorned her? Or worse, what if the religious authorities were right and by touching Jesus' robe, she made him unclean? If you've heard people calling you, "Unclean, unclean!" for years, it's not hard to imagine that you would come to believe that about yourself. Of course, her touch didn't make Jesus unclean. And somehow, she knew that would be the case. She believed. The fact that she braved the scorn and admonishment of the people in her community, on the hope that Jesus would heal her, demonstrated her faith.

You might be wondering how Jesus sensed anything given the crowd pressing against him. Dozens of people were touching Jesus - it shows his power when he asks, "Who touched me?" Through all of the commotion, Jesus sensed her presence and felt the power of her faith. It's easy to miss this part: Jesus felt her reaching out to him despite the chaos all around them. This reminds us that in the middle of storms and in the middle of chaos, Jesus is aware when we are reaching out to him.

The woman with the hemorrhage was healed because she reached out in faith, believing that if she could just touch the robe of Jesus, she would be healed. She had only heard of this Jesus. She heard stories about Jesus and chose to believe that he was the true Son of God. He was different from the dozens of men who claimed to be the Messiah before Jesus. Yes, he was different, and she knew it. And with that faith, she fought through a crowd of people who wanted her to shrink back in shame, who wanted to rebuke her with every footstep closer to Jesus. She fought her way through the condemnation of the "clean" people who surrounded Jesus. It was this faith that carried her to Jesus. It was this faith that made her whole. It was this faith that ultimately restored her to communion with God and to the community where she lived.

Hers is not the only healing story from today's reading. Jesus also saved a little girl from dying. Now did Jesus perform these miracles to demonstrate God's power - to make a mighty show of the Messiah's superpowers? Of course not. In fact, Jesus warns all the onlookers not to tell anyone about the miraculous healing of the little girl thought to be dead. Why is that?

I think he does this so that people can still have the ability - or opportunity - to show faith. Seeing someone raised from the dead leaves little room for doubt. How different is the story of a woman with a hemorrhage if it happened right after seeing Jesus raise the little girl from the dead? Her act would no longer be the same act of faith. It would be more of a transaction, an instance of "if this happens,

then that will happen next.” Believing that a miracle has occurred is very different than believing a miracle will occur.

It was faith that started the process of healing for the woman with a hemorrhage, as well as for the synagogue leader’s daughter. And for the women who participate in the Talitha organization, they have faith that they will somehow receive healing from all of the trauma they have endured. Healing for the woman with a hemorrhage, healing for the little girl, and healing for the women in the Talitha program all begins with a miracle. It all begins with Jesus showing them love and changing their circumstances. In all these cases, Jesus begins the process of restoration.

But in all these cases - the woman with a hemorrhage, the little girl who was dying, and these women who were figuratively dying in the captivity of human trafficking, it is the community they are restored to which completes the work Jesus began in them. When Jesus heals the woman with a hemorrhage, he allows her to rejoin society. Being “whole” for her means receiving the acceptance of the people around her who had turned her away because of her ailment. Like the woman with a hemorrhage, no one seemingly wants to touch the women in the Talitha program. The goal of Talitha is to restore these women back to community in the similar way that Jesus did for the woman with a hemorrhage. Talitha Arts works hard to show them and help them believe that they are not “unclean” - and restores them to community.

And like the daughter of the synagogue leader, Talitha seeks to raise these women from the “dead.” When Jesus heals the little girl, being “alive” means coming out of her room and walking among her family and her community. For the women in the Talitha program, being “whole,” being “alive,” and being “healed” happens when these women can enjoy normal lives and be loved, accepted and valued in the world around them. In all these cases, faith brings them to Jesus, who performs a miracle which is completed by their communities.

My beloved siblings at CCUCC, we are a community. As a community, we can share in the miraculous work of healing that Jesus offers people who believe. It is our job as a community of faith to carry forth the miracle of restoration and recovery for our neighbors who are seeking Jesus’ healing. People of faith, whenever we welcome the least of these, whenever we are gracious and whenever we offer extravagant welcome, we are helping Jesus perform miracles in peoples’ lives. When we as a community seek wholeness and restoration for those who are lost and broken, we are serving Christ by being his body, performing miracles to his glory! When we as a community of faith make it clear to our greater community that all are welcome and that all of God’s children will be greeted with love and respect, we become that city on a hill that can’t be hidden! When we make it clear that all are welcome, and valued, the stones that make up this beautiful sanctuary will cry out God’s glory! And when we choose to be a community that offers care healing to those of us who are broken and lost, this church will cry out “Talitha cum!” “Get up girl! You’ve been healed.”

I’ll close with one last story from Talitha: the story of Mariela Shaker, a beneficiary of the type of support that Talitha gives to refugees. Born and raised in Aleppo, Syria, she studied music until she was forced to flee from the relentless violence of a 5-year civil war. At the time, many countries were

rejecting refugees from Syria. Mariela was an outsider, an outcast, a stranger in foreign lands. Eventually, she was welcomed in the UK. She spent some time in Jersey Island, and then was invited to Monmouth University in New Jersey here in the US. Mariela is now an ambassador for Talitha International. She is also a violinist, and if you were able to be in church on Sunday, you would hear a video of her performing the theme song from the movie *Shindler's List*. The photo below is an image taken during that performance:

May we as a community of faith bring about healing where it's needed, restoration to community,



and new life for all God's children. Amen.