

First Friends Church, A Quaker Meeting  
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett  
June 27, 2021  
Abundant Celebration  
Mark 5:21-43

Reading

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 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 around 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.

Message

Every moment of life and every breath of the earth and its' creatures witness to the Love and peace of God. Here in the Eternal now everything around us testifies God finds us and all of creation good. We are of great worth and we are called to abundant celebration of that fact. Yet in our lives and in our stories; the

powers and principalities, our fearful and prideful egos, fear and feelings of inadequacy, death and despair, and the brokenness of individuals and structural inadequacies of society try to deny that fact.

The two healed by Jesus were the least of the least, two hopelessly dying people; an endlessly unclean woman, and a girl-child on death's doorstep. Illness and death were seen as God's punishment for the sins of individuals and whole families. In addition, society said the woman was worthless to family, community and society because she was ill. Women and girls, even daughters of leaders in the synagogue, were worthy only if they lived long enough to bear sons.

Yet in both cases, we see a last ditch, no holds barred, brave, determined, counter-cultural striving to assert worth- in despair the woman was forced into poverty, spending all she had seeking treatment. Doubtless the father had sought help from all the doctors and his religion too. Risking public scorn and ridicule they approached Jesus -a poor, itinerant, nobody, an outsider. The father reduced himself to begging in front of other leaders. The woman exposed herself to attack by the crowd, being ill in public and touching the stranger with her unclean hand.

The woman had suffered the entirety of the little girl's lifetime- twelve years. It was the time it took for a girl child to become an adult- a generation. The number 12 is an intentional detail in the story. It represents completeness and symbolizes an end to generations of suffering and death. In the Gospel according

to Luke Jesus proclaimed Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled: "...God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of Jubilee."<sup>1</sup> A great reason for abundant celebration!

Yet, instead of drawing attention on himself Jesus told the woman, "Daughter of God, your faith has set you free." And when the girl was released from death he told her family, "Get on with your life- give her something to eat." It seems he was saying, "Nothing to see here folks, all is now as it should always be." In the Wisdom of Solomon <sup>2</sup> we read, "God did not make death, and does not delight in the death of the living. For God created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them, and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal." Jesus declared the year of the Lord- God's kingdom on earth is complete/at hand now, freedom, healing, wholeness. Celebrate abundantly!

In the eyes of God who sees stars born and universes collapse, empires rise and fall, humans kill and be killed, even the sparrow and lilies of the field have priceless worth. The query that arises is who is seen as having little worth in our society? How do we go out to them and abundantly celebrate them by including them in life as they should always be? After the ravages of the last year it would be

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 4:18-19

<sup>2</sup> 1:13-2:24

a wonder if weren't afraid of "unclean" touch and searching for worth. We experienced "contagion" physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. But we are called to be God's agents in healing illness of the body, mind, heart and spirit for ourselves, our community and our country. How do we begin to live the prophecy Jesus says has been fulfilled?

We have the example of the last ditch, no holds barred, brave, determined, counter-cultural striving to assert worth. To embrace it I have been remaking myself and taking chances to be present in ways that stretch my awareness and boundaries; constantly challenging myself to recognize what keeps me from realizing my own worth and the worth of those around me; racism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, classism, nationalism, materialism and violent nature.

I listened to a podcast discuss historical changes that have occurred in our world-view and have changed the role of the church in society. People no longer see religion as leading and setting the tone. In our secularized world the church no longer represents the sacred or defines moral rules. It is not acceptable to simply teach how to worship or demonstrate faith, or to encourage participation in charity and church activities, even if it is to serve the world. It is no longer about teaching a vision of heaven to come, how to avoid sin, how to escape from daily trials, or

even about programs that compete with the activities outside by being flashy or fun or score “service to the community” points.

Today being church and ministering is inviting people into an experience of community, relationship, and connection with each other and God. It is accompanying people and helping them move deeper into and find fullness in the everyday-ness, to see meaning in life. It is about helping them seek and answer the lure to an experience of something bigger - being part of God, the universe and each other. As faithful people we are now called to walk alongside people in attending to and celebrating our connections, in fear and doubt, and to invite them into the more that is and can be among and within us. Instead of mediating and doling out the sacred, doing charitable works and teaching morality, we are to abundantly celebrate right where we are in the ordinariness of life, and to lift up the worth of every person and creation. In the story today Jesus did just that.

This week The Poor People’s Campaign started a 365 day campaign toward a Third Reconstruction. After the civil war the First Reconstruction sought equality for Blacks in voting, politics, and use of public facilities. The Second Reconstruction in the 1950's sought integration, the end of Jim Crow and work toward a biracial democracy.<sup>3</sup> The Third Reconstruction has a broader mission; to

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/poor-peoples-campaign-steps-up-drive-for-third-reconstruction/>  
<http://studyworld.com/basementpapers/repce/History/15.htm#:~:text=The%20First%20and%20Second%20Reconstructions%20held%20out%20the,in%20voting%2C%20politics%2C%20and%20use%20of%20public%20facilities.>

fully address poverty and affirm the worth of all people, “centering the needs of the 140 million people who are poor, low-wealth and/or living one emergency away from economic ruin...” in a socially inclusive economy. The campaign sees our Federal budget as a "moral document exposes the priorities and values." It means ...every child gets a good chance in life with publicly provided health care, childcare, and quality education. Every worker gets a decent wage with union-backed collective bargaining and public labor standards, including vacation time, family leave and sick leave. Citizens are encouraged to vote, and registration is easy if not automatic.”<sup>4</sup> It prioritizes people over war and values the earth. It is worth considering as an abundant celebration of the worth of all of God’s creation.

We can start our own abundant celebration of worth with an easy exercise. Many of us are shy, but we have the comfort of the boundary of the zoom screen. As we enter open worship, I invite you to keep your microphone muted but turn on your camera. Then take time to look at each person in their little zoom rectangle and say, “I celebrate you.” Celebrate that of God, the distinctiveness, the uniqueness of each Friend. Each of our stories is complex and intricate. No matter how well we get to know each other we will never know fully, and we do not even fully know ourselves. But for a few minutes we can experience and celebrate the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/25/opinions/third-reconstruction-end-poverty-sachs/index.html> How a Third Reconstruction could end American poverty

absolute unbounded worth of the Light within together. God is present in abundant celebration now.