

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

June 28, 2009

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

¹After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.

¹⁷David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. ¹⁸(He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said: ¹⁹Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! ²⁰Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult. ²¹You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more. ²²From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty. ²³Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. ²⁴O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. ²⁵How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. ²⁶I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. ²⁷How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

Mark 5:21-43

²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²²Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³and 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." ²⁴So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." ²⁹Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³²He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" ³⁶But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and

wailing loudly. ³⁹When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰And 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. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

"The Hem of Vision"

**"If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Wow! What vision!
"If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Now that is vision!**

Here is this woman who has suffered with a physical problem for a dozen years. There have been many theories as to what her problem really was, but ultimately I do not think that it matters. What is of greater interest to me is the moment of decision that she reached when she heard Jesus was coming. She heard he was coming and at that juncture said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

Vision. Yes. But, do understand that there was no way a woman had any right to reach out and touch a man. In that world women had no rights at all. They were forbidden from reaching out and touching a man when they were not invited to do so.

This woman made a decision. She made a decision out of her vision. "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." There as a moment of decision, and then was the risk that was included in carrying that vision out. This is true for the woman. It is also true for Jairus and his situation. Here he was, a leader in the synagogue and he makes a risky decision. He decides to come to Jesus and ask, implore him, even beg him to come and lay hands on his sick, dying daughter.

That could not have been an easy step to take. We know that Jesus is never popular with the religious leaders and insiders. The institution of the Church constantly rejects him and cannot deal with his sweeping

judgments and interpretations of either the law or their role. Yet, Jairus makes the decision. Jairus takes the risk. Jairus comes to Jesus for help.

When Jairus made that decision, when Jairus stepped forward in risk to his career and came to Jesus—that was true vision. It was not accident, and it was not chance—it was vision.

I want us to pay attention to the role of vision in these two stories in one today. This issue of vision is a current buzz word both in the church and in the secular world. When we talk about vision in the church so often people think of those wonderfully crafted vision statements and mission statements that all churches have. We have one of those too. And it is apt. Yet, the vision piece of it is much larger than the statement.

The same is true of the secular world. Corporations have vision statements. If those corporations are to live into what those statements say then they have to do more than articulate words, they have to put those principles into action.

The same is true of each of our lives. We can have a vision for who we are as a person and what we want out of life—but to not put that into action is to not really have the vision.

There has to be that moment when we think, as she did, “if I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” And were we to stop there at the thinking stage that might be insightful and even interesting, but there is no impact until we push our way in the crowd and stretch out the hand to reach. That woman would have continued to suffer with here issue had she not put the vision into action.

Vision is to be seen as a verb. Verbs are the words that describe actions. They describe what you do. Want to see if the vision for your life matches the way you are living it out, then look at the actions in your days. What are those actions? What are the verbs in your living? Where are the places that there is movement? That more appropriately describes the vision in your life.

The same is true of the church—our vision is to “change lives and grow in God’s love.” We can say that a hundred times a year, we can print it on the bulletin, we can even print it on pew pencils and flashy letterhead. That does not matter. It is not about what you say, it is about what you do.

Vision is living out your articulated purpose. As we, as a church and as the Body of Christ, ...as we truly change lives and grow in God’s love...as we make those moves and put those words into action that is when those words take on meaning.

We do not articulate our vision by speaking the words. We articulate the words in order to describe the actions that are and will purposefully and intentionally take as we live in this world in this time.

That is vision. And ultimately I think all vision comes back to seeing the world as a place to love and a place to be connected to each other and to God. When Jesus stopped in the street having felt that power went out from him, he called out the woman who had touched him. It was in fear and trembling that she came and knelt down before him.

One would think that she may have been tempted to run and hide at that point. Rather than admitting that she had reached out and touched

when in that culture she was forbidden to do so, one would think it would have been a whole lot easier for her to bolt than own up to her actions. But she comes forward.

When she does come forward—Jesus lifts her up and proclaims, “Woman it is your faith that has made you well.” See, there is this connection that Jesus wants her, and the crowd, and those of us reading and participating in this story through the centuries to see—we are to see that it is the connection between the woman and God’s realm in her life (call it the Kingdom of God or the presence of God) that is the source of healing.

The same is true of Jairus’ daughter. They tell him that it is now too late and the girl is dead. “Forget it. Don’t bother the teacher any longer.” Jesus does not listen but continues to the house. They are already weeping and mourning the way that was customary. Jesus sends them out—and says, she is only sleeping. They think he’s off his rocker. But Jesus has vision—Jesus has that connectedness going on. He takes her hand, calls out to her, and she sits up alive and hungry.

*

There is that wonderful old Celtic concept of the “thin place.” It is that concept of the gloaming. The gloaming is that place where the distance between the earth and heavens is thin—where they meet. There one can see the holy, feel the holy, know the holy, participate in the holy. When we live in vision we see those thin places, we live in that gloaming.

*

I had an experience of one of those thin places this week. Last Saturday after VBS I talked with my brother in Arlington, VA who called me because one of my nieces from South Dakota is here on the east coast and staying with them. In true to form fashion for my family we don’t plan

much in advance. Lance wanted to know if I would take Kaylene to the beach overnight as she wanted to see the ocean. I agreed.

An hour later my sister-in-law called that my eight year old niece wanted to go too. Could I take them both? Of course Uncle Daris can do that! So last Sunday afternoon I packed the two girls in the car and off we went for the ocean. Monday morning we went to the beach itself. Them in their swimsuits and me toting all the gear. I sat there on the beach in my chair watching them play at the water's edge. It was a thin place. Here was one child of my older brother, and another child of my younger brother dancing with delight as the waves swept in and out.

I remember thinking, "How good this is. This is what it is all about." Not so much being at the beach, but the connections—the connections of family of love and next generations. Kaylene, the older one, kept looking out for Marin, the younger one. Both of them kept looking back at me to see that they had not gone out to far—and when they did, I would wave them back with my hand.

That was holiness in that ordinary event. So too was there this week in watching the day care children share a meal under the tents outside. They sang spontaneously, "who built the ark, Noah, Noah, brother Noah built the ark." They had sung it in chapel the day before.

Event after event...if we pay attention there is that vision of God moving and acting and ready.

Event after event ... if we pay attention there is that vision of God being present for us. And that presence is healing... it is powerful... it is palpable ...it is real.

Vision is not about certainty. We do not have vision to be certain of where we are going next or what will come next. Vision is less about certainty and more about the certain trustworthiness of God. One could say that vision is less about certainty and more about vulnerability.

It is in being vulnerable that the Woman reached—ah what vision. It was out of her risk...out of her vulnerability that she had the vision... “If I but touch his clothing, I will be made well.”

Dress yourself in such vision—it is a thin place! Amen.