

Journeys of Faith

Sermon for 28 June 2015, on Mark 5:21-34

Jesus said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed.'

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Reading through the Bible, we not only find the large movements and themes of the story of mankind, but we also find the numerous individual men and women, boys and girls whom God blesses and calls to cooperate in his kingdom. We have the larger story of creation, the fall, the formation of the people of faith, and the coming of the Messiah, but we also read interesting vignettes such as the courtship of Boaz and Ruth, or of Hannah bringing Samuel to the Temple, and David fighting a lion and a bear for his sheep in the Judean wilderness. We can see God entering into relationship with people and working in their daily lives, doing extraordinary things. This gives us reason to hope that God is interested in our daily lives as well. For many, their first exposure to Christian theology could be summed up in the song "Jesus loves me, this I know", and the reason, "for the Bible tells me so".

Likewise in the Gospels we find many illustrations of how the great movements of our Salvation are also filtered through encounters with individuals. I suppose Jesus could have arrived like a superhero and directly saved mankind by some powerful, single act. Rather, he fully took on humanity by coming as a baby, born of Mary, raised in the home at Nazareth. The road to Calvary was not a straight line, but rather a series of detours. On his journey to Jerusalem to die on the cross for the sins of the world, Jesus stops and engages with ordinary people and their everyday problems. In these encounters, we learn a lot about human nature, and we learn a lot about Jesus. In today's Gospel, it is also amazing to see how little has changed over the years, for example the cost of health care: the woman in the crowd had spent all she had! And she grew worse, not better! She assumed she would be healed in a mechanical sense, where she would touch Jesus' robe and be healed, while remaining lost in the crowd. However, Jesus elevated the importance of this moment, when he stopped and asked, "Who touched me?". In Jesus' simple but

profound question, we see that he wishes to know us, and to be known by us.

Formed in this faith, we are able to put together the greater story of our lives with a meaning which is both cosmic and personal. This summer, my family and I had to go from San Diego to Annapolis, and we decided that we didn't just want to travel here quickly (which we could have certainly done in a 5 hour flight). Instead we decided to make an adventure out of it, and take a three week trip across the country by RV, visiting some of our great National Parks and experiencing America in its vastness and in its people. In doing so, we hoped to have a journey that would be full of life-changing experiences that would continue to unfold. We started out in California's San Bernardino National Forest and crossed through Death Valley, one of the lowest places in America. I had heard that Las Vegas is called "sin city", so I had to stop and investigate (out of professional interest). What I found was that Las Vegas does more business conventions than any other city in the world, and they do more weddings than the United States Naval Academy! Before leaving Nevada we experienced the Hoover Dam and Lake Meade, testament to the engineering skill and lots of hard work by ordinary Americans. It was a project that continues to make the desert bloom, built on the sacrifices of the 112 workers who perished during its construction. We then ascended into a great geological formation known as the Colorado Plateau. The Colorado Plateau spans Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico features incredible canyons, delicate sandstone arches and sweeping mountain vistas. Some of our great (but also lesser-known national parks are located here), including Zion National Park and Arches National Park. Thus, we went from "Sin City" to "Zion"! In Zion National park we found that many Americans of faith from times past had already been there and bestowed biblical names on many of its great features, such as the Great White Throne, Angels Landing and the Three Patriarchs. The park rangers told us a stories of the immense eons of pre-historic time during which this plateau was formed: that was the scientific story, but the theological story is a story of God's beautiful creation, and the home he has made for you and I to journey in. We narrowly missed some weather on our trip, including a late spring snow storm in the Rocky Mountains, and a

rash of tornados on the high plains of Kansas. I felt much more comfortable after crossing the Mississippi River, and entered the mid-west where I grew up. The closer we got to the East Coast, the more we became aware of the fact that we were in a smaller, more densely populated place, with more history. Coming to Annapolis, experiencing its river, its coast and its narrow streets, we have relished in the smallness of the place, and its rich historical significance.

Against the backdrop of this journey, our family began to experience a change. We simplified our daily lives quite a bit: we cut back on the electronic gadgets and distractions of suburban California, and spent more time socializing. We began each day in prayer, and we seemed to grow closer and more understanding of one another as the journey progressed. I learned to know and appreciate my wife and kids much more, and we arrived here much changed and more close knit than before, ready to spend the next three years in the Academy as a stronger, more cohesive family.

This journey will be one of the great events of our family history. Along the way, we also encountered many individuals, who showed us some of the character of this great land, and why it is the way it is. The landscape told the story of America's physical beauty, but the people told the story of its wealth of humanity. One memorable experience I had was when a truck driver in West Virginia helped me with my tow equipment. He was a grandfatherly type, and must have noticed me trying to grease the weight distribution bars on my hitch. It was my first time to do this, and it definitely wasn't going smoothly. He came over and showed me quickly and efficiently how to do it. When I got a bit too much grease on the components, he said "I have a rag in my truck". At the time, because of his regional accent, I couldn't understand what he said: but before I could figure it out, he had gone to his big rig and come back with a rag, and humbly cleaned away the excess grease from our hitch. His kindness to a stranger taught me about what's possible when we empathize with each other and seek understanding.

The people you and I meet on a daily basis are a lot like the people we read of in scripture: we can view them against the backdrop of God's plan for the world and for humanity. Taught

by scripture, we can view them not just as disconnected individuals, but as people made in God's image, who have a place in his kingdom. The vignettes from the Gospel, and the vignettes from our family's summer journey, lead me to ask you the question: what great things and what great small things are going to take place in your life this year, this month or right now, on your journey of faith? As you contemplate the great contours of your life story until now, birth, school, college, marriage and family life, know that God not only cares about the big story. He not only cares about saving the world, he cares about you and your needs here and now. His faithfulness extends to the small and ordinary: he is closer to you than we are to one another. His mercies are new every morning. Finding him, and being found by him, along our journeys of faith, we are blessed and are able to be a blessing.

The Christian mystic, Evelyn Underhill, wrote "The life, beauty and meaning of the whole created order, from the tomtit to the Milky Way, refers back to the Absolute Life and Beauty of its Creator: and so perceived, so lived, every bit has spiritual significance. Thus the old woman of the legend could boil her potatoes to the greater glory of God; and St. Teresa, taking her turn in the kitchen, found Him very easily among the pots and pans." And so it is in our daily routines, lived amidst the immense backdrop of God's world. In a few days from now, Plebe Summer will break like a tsunami on all of us here at the Academy. The journeys on which these young men and women are embarking will be more amazing than I can imagine. For a time, our journeys will run together. I know that the kindness and generosity of this congregation is going to be one of the bright spots on the consciousness of these young men and women, as they test the outer limits of their own physical, mental and emotional endurance. I look forward to the peace that they will find here in God's presence and in your presence. Uniting our stories with the whole of God's story, may we prepare ourselves for the great and small ways that God will make us part of his kingdom today, tomorrow and forever. Amen.