

RESILIENCY & MORTALITY

6/27/21 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Proper 8 (B): Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Lamentations 3:21-33; ~~2 Corinthians 8:7-15~~; Mark 5:21-43

A number of years ago, when I was working at the Rainier Club in Seattle, I met a woman who had written a book on talking with loved ones about death. Her impetus, for writing the book, was, in the days after her mother died unexpectedly, she had to fly to her hometown and make all kinds of decisions and arrangements that she and her parents had never discussed.

She swore that she would do things differently with her father, when his time came. But knowing not everyone would have these kinds of conversations, she designed the manual with her own experience in mind—that someone could pick it up in an airport bookstore, read it during the flight, and deboard the plane feeling a lot more prepared than she had.

I thought this was a fabulous idea! So, I suggested having this author speak at a women's breakfast group I facilitated every month at the club. Much to my chagrin, the planning committee seemed almost horrified that I suggested such a topic. One of them said, "No one wants to sit around and talk about death—especially not at breakfast!"

Maybe that's one of the many reasons I became a priest—most of you expect me to talk with you about our mortality. Even so, the majority of us don't really want to have conversations about death. At the same time, we all understand, intellectually, that we are mortal, and that we'll all leave our physical bodies one day.

Our readings today are all about death and mortality, and how we might understand that from God's perspective. The passage from Wisdom says: "God did not make death, and God does not delight in the death of the living," and continues, "For God created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome."

The message seems to be that, while God created humanity, and we are mortal beings, God still intends for us to have life. There's a message that's difficult to wrap our brains around, but it's that—even though we experience physical death—it's not final; it's just the transition to the next phase of life in God.

I've been at the bedside of many people as they transition out of this physical dimension. When I asked one of them, recently, if they were scared at all, they said, "No," shrugged their shoulders and added, "Death is part of life." I was impressed with that attitude, but I also understood—because I knew the person well—that the comment was based in deep faith.

Understanding God's perspective on physical death won't make us miss our loved ones any less, but it can help us begin the road to healing and guide the transformation of our relationship with them. Coming to terms with our own mortality can also help us more fully appreciate the life we have today, and our resiliency in the face of mortality.

I've been thinking a lot about resilience; some of you heard me explore that in last week's "From My Living Room to Yours" video. And, what great testaments to resilience are presented

in our Gospel reading this morning! These two individuals—Jarius, a leader of the synagogue, and the woman who has been hemorrhaging for 12 years—normally wouldn't have been in Jesus's social circle. But they've heard of his ability to heal and they have sought him out.

In particular, this woman fights tooth and nail to get to Jesus. In her condition—with all the blood—she would've been considered “dirty or tainted”, and restricted to the edges of society; she would've been banned from many places, and, yet, Jesus, not only allows her in his presence, he acknowledges her.

Again, the idea of healing can be hard to wrap our brains around, because what these passages tell us isn't that God will always remove our physical ailments and extend our earthly lives. Rather God's healing comes in many forms. Healing might be a reconciliation between family members. Healing might take the form of psychological insights. Healing might result in societal barriers being removed.

In the case of the hemorrhaging woman, she is healed of her disease, but other important healing takes place as Jesus proclaims her place in God's family. He calls her, “Daughter”, and reminds her that it's her faith that has healed her. Our faith leads to healing. Which is why Jesus says to Jarius words that are very similar to what we heard him say to the disciples out in the boat last week: “Do not fear, only believe.”

The way it's explained in the passage from Wisdom is: “God...made us in the image of God's own eternity.” That's a unique way of looking at it. Not only are we created in God's image, but in the image of God's own eternity.” One theologian describes God's eternity this way: an extension of “an ongoing relationship with God that is beyond time.” She continues:

Such a long-term view provides hope for human life rather than despair. It frees the faithful to do things that do not make any sense in the short-term: Work for justice. Give to the poor. Care for widows and orphans. Build peaceful relationships.”¹

In the face of our own mortality—in the midst of our own resilience to seek healing and the generative forces of life—we are asked to live into this notion that we are created in God's image, which means surrendering to God's claim on us.

But if we limit those ideas to life here on earth, versus the eternity of time with God, we will remain fearful of death and uncomfortable with talking about our own mortality. And when we're fearful and uncomfortable, we're less likely to take the exquisite risks God asks us to take—to love freely and fully...even with the threat of losing our loved ones to the next phase of life.

We are mortal; we are resilient, and our faith will heal us.

¹ Leanne Pearce Reed in *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 3, p. 175.

Collect of the Day:

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24

God did not make death,
And he does not delight in the death of the living.
For he 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.

God created us for incorruption,
and made us in the image of his own eternity,
but through the devil's envy death entered the world,
and those who belong to his company experience it.

Lamentations 3:21-33

This I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”
The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
It is good for one to bear
the yoke in youth,
to sit alone in silence
when the Lord has imposed it,
to put one's mouth to the dust
(there may yet be hope),

to give one's cheek to the smiter,
and be filled with insults.

For the Lord will not
reject for ever.

Although he causes grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
for he does not willingly afflict
or grieve anyone.

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

As you excel in everything-- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you-- so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something-- now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has-- not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."

Mark 5:21-43

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." 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.