

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 8/Year B
St. Anne's Episcopal Church
Winston-Salem, NC
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Imagine a room. A room full of people of all types. Each with differences, but each identified as leaders in their respective communities.

Each goes around and shares something of themselves. Some share issues and problems that have recently taken place – the ending of relationships, illnesses, challenges of all sorts. Others share long-standing difficulties, hearkening back to experiences endured in the distant past and some that are on-going in the present.

What takes priority? The acute or the chronic? The immediate or the gradual? Is the priority assessed based on the person's standing in the group?

A similar line of questioning could arise from today's gospel. Jairus appears and begs Jesus to come see about his dying daughter. Jairus is important, a leader of the synagogue. Jairus is no doubt righteous, ritually pure, paying close attention to the regulations of Jewish faith and practice. Jesus takes notice of his need, realizes his distress and begins to follow him to his home.

On the way, an unnamed, poor woman sees her last chance at healing. She has battled a chronic hemorrhaging disease for a dozen years. She has done everything, is now destitute from medical bills, and is desperate.

She touches Jesus' clothes. She knows that she is considered “unclean” because of the blood. She feels that she cannot approach Jesus, face-to-face. She touches his clothes – the hem of his garment – and is made whole and clean and well.

Remember, Jesus is on his way to see about Jairus' daughter, is focused on the task ahead, but he is waylaid from behind. He feels the power flow from him and stops and demands to know who it is that has touched him. Did Jesus have to stop? Was it necessary that he know whom he had healed? Clearly it wasn't just the touch that effected the healing. There is little doubt that others were touching him as he walked along; the crowd being so close that the disciples questioned the legitimacy of the question.

Jesus knew he needed to interact with the particular one that had touched him in a way that accessed his power without his consent; wanted to speak with the one whose faith had moved the miraculous to bear on their situation. He stops and waits, wasting precious time for Jairus' daughter, looking intently into the crowd for the one who has touched him.

As is often the case when we meet Jesus, the woman tells him everything and instead of reprimanding her and asking more questions, Jesus deals with the truth of the matter – her faith has made her well (a fact that she already knows) – and now the crowd knows what she and Jesus already know. Jesus is intent, in this instance, to make plain for everyone around, that faith provides the access to God's healing power.

In the time that this exchange takes, Jairus' daughter dies and word is brought that Jesus is no longer needed. Jesus is, again, in a position to demonstrate how great God's love and power are. The emergency nature of the situation has passed. Jesus missed his opportunity, yet Jesus always sees the need for what it is. He continues to move, with deliberate intention, to the house and does what cannot be done – raises the child back to life.

Do you remember that group that I mentioned before? What became evident in the time of sharing is that Jesus makes no distinction as to the worthiness of the person or the situation when it comes to their healing. It did not matter that the room was full of identified leaders or even that their stories raised questions as to the details of how and they came to the place where healing was necessary. What mattered was that they were in need of healing, and the community recognized that and surrounded them with the healing love that is the hallmark of communities that gather in the name of Jesus.

So much more could be said (and indeed will be said over the coming weeks and months), but I would like for each of us to think about the healing that we know needs to take place. Whether it is the healing that is personal or the healing that is for others, think not about the details or the worthiness of the request or the one who is requesting; focus, as Jesus did, on the faith of the one(s) who need to be healed. Take a cue from our Lord and reach out with the power of the love of God as we intentionally and unintentionally use that power to heal those around us.