

June 30, 2024

Mark 5:21-43

Sermon Title: Rise Up!

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

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

35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the synagogue leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the synagogue leader, "Do not be afraid; only believe." 37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 38 When they came to the synagogue leader's house, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 40 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. 41 Taking her by the hand, he said to her, "Talitha koum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" 42 And immediately the girl stood up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.

Please pray with me:

God be in our heads and in our understanding. God be in our eyes and in our looking. God be in our mouths and in our speaking. God be in our hearts and in our thinking. Amen.

A young girl – an older woman. The older woman has been sick as long as the little girl has been alive, 12 years. Both need healing. The woman reaches out to Jesus in an act of desperation. She can't afford one more doctor. Not only is she physically ill, but she is also socially labeled unclean, which means she can't be with her people until the bleeding stops. For

twelve years she has been cut off from community, from affection, from life. Unclean is as good as unseen. She cannot be touched, nor can she touch others according to the law. Yet, she reaches out to Jesus, if only to brush the hem of his robe. And as she does, her body is healed.

“Who touched me?” asks Jesus. Surrounded by a crowd of people rushing with him to the home of Jairus, his question seems ridiculous. But she knows and she falls at his feet confessing what she has done. With tenderness he speaks to her calling her “daughter” and telling her that her faith has made her well. “Go in peace,” he says, “and be healed of your disease.” And though the story doesn’t say it, I imagine Jesus reaching out his hand to help her to her feet.

This interruption delayed Jesus’ arrival at the home of Jairus where the little girl is dying. “It’s too late,” was the message as Jesus and the crowd arrived. It’s too late. She’s dead. Jesus sees Jairus as he hears the news. I imagine him falling to the ground in a heap of inconsolable grief and Jesus reaching out his hand saying, “Don’t be afraid, only believe.” Together they enter the house, where the wailing has already begun. With three of his disciples, and the girl’s parents, Jesus sees the girl, lying in stillness, and he says to her, (**pronounced Tal-ee-ta Koom**) “*Talitha koom,*” which means, “*Little girl, get up!*” Do you suppose he held out his hand to help her to her feet?

There is so much more here than the obvious miracles. Jesus refuses to treat the “daughter” touching his hem as any less than the daughter of an important leader in the community. Both rise up. And so does Jairus. If you tune out the noise, the crowds, the wailing, the shouts to “hurry up;” if you tune out all the chaos, there is tenderness, there is the recognition of one’s need and suffering, there is cause for hope.

I don’t know anyone who has gotten the miracle, but I do know plenty who have gotten the healing. I do know people who have been able to rise to their feet because someone recognized their suffering with tenderness and offered a dash of hope or maybe a shot of faith.

“Telling Stories in the Dark” is the name of the book our small group is studying this summer. It is not too late to participate if you are interested. The book, written by Lynn Munroe’s brother Jeffrey, is a compilation of stories about people and their experience with suffering and trauma ...stories of people brought to their knees by tragedy ...stories of people in need of healing. I don’t recall any stories mentioning miracles. But each one, in its own way, speaks of a hand outstretched, a tender voice, a word of hope – a person who cared. Just showing up can help someone rise up to take one more step toward peace and wholeness.

I once was gifted with such a story. Ilene was my custodian at 80 years old. She was smart and funny and spoke her mind. Months after asking people to share their faith stories, I found this story on my desk. On the top of the page it said, “Faith,” and in a scribbled note she said this was her faith story and I could do whatever I want with it. Here is what she wrote:

I loved Aunt Olga. She lived with Uncle Arthur and her three sons and two daughters on a farm eight miles from our farm. Seventy years ago, in the great depression, people didn't waste gas going around just to visit, so when I got to go and spend a couple of days with Aunt Olga and Uncle Art and the cousins, it was a special time. Aunt Olga's kitchen always smelled like molasses cookies and baking bread. At mealtimes, I would sit quietly at the table and listen as Uncle Art read from the Bible, followed with a prayer. Aunt Olga's house was always peaceful and serene, not like my home. It seemed like there was continual quarreling and fights between our parents. There were eleven of us, and our poor parents had too many children, not enough money, not enough time, and not much to look forward to. When I was at Aunt Olga's house I used to wonder why our home couldn't be like hers. When bedtime came, I would sit and watch Aunt Olga brush her beautiful brown hair and tell her of my cares and worries. Even though I tried to hide my fears over the hopeless situation I would begin to weep, and Aunt Olga would wrap her arms around me and whisper, "Oh honey, you must have faith. Things will be better, just don't lose faith." And I would take to heart that somehow things would be better for all of us.

And then our mother died when she was 44 of a fast moving melanoma, and left 11 children between the ages of 7 and 24. We stayed in the big country house with our dad, and we learned the meaning of working together. I think we all had faith that we would survive. The ladies aid from our church brought us food and clothing until we were able to get on our feet. We were all baptized and confirmed in our church, and we all graduated from school. So we didn't do too bad even though we didn't set the world on fire. So, I can testify that all things are possible if you just don't lose your faith. And I know this because Aunt Olga told me so.

Can't you just see her Aunt Olga, wrapping her arms around a young Ilene? "Oh honey, you must have faith. Things will be better." Ilene treasured this memory, this encouragement, the whole of her life.

When you are in a dark place, brought to your knees by tragedy, it's tough to imagine that things you will ever stand again. Pain, worry, fear, grief can paralyze us so much, we see no way out. But a little encouragement, and tender loving presence can be what we need in the moment to take a next step – and just a little faith can help us see cracks in the darkness – just a little faith can give us the strength reach out – just a little faith can open our hearts to a larger hope. Aunt Olga was so right...don't lose your faith.

The words "talitha kum" came to mind as I remembered Ilene's story. Ilene's story helped me to appreciate the tenderness in Jesus' voice as he said, "Little girl, rise up!" That's what talitha kum means. It's Aramaic which was the language that Jesus spoke. The entire New Testament is written in conversational Greek – and yet the gospel writer wanted us to read Jesus' words in his native tongue. Don't you wonder why? Bill Nichols, a great Disciples of Christ preacher and storyteller, said it's because these words in their original language were so tender – so beautiful – so powerful – no translation would do them justice.

Aunt Olga didn't say "talitha koum," and yet with tenderness and affection she raised up a little girl.

In the sorrow and despair that followed the attacks of 9/11 the call to faith came from an unlikely source. In his song, My City's in Ruins, Bruce Springsteen touched the pain of our nation brought to its knees by the unthinkable. His song surveyed the grief and horror being felt by so many. It crescendos to a powerful chorus that is both tender and hopeful. Over and over again he sings, come on and rise up, come on and rise up. Come on and rise up, come on and rise up.

Out of the still smoldering ashes he called us to remember that we are resurrection people. Come on and rise up, come on and rise up. Talitha koum. In the midst of darkness and destruction he called us again to our faith and to each other. He called us to reach out to the one who has the power to raise us up and to heal us. Come on and rise up. Come on and rise up.

In our darkest moments – Christ stands at the ready, often embodied in unlikely people like Aunt Olga, or you and me, who, recognize suffering and show up with tenderness and a dash of hope and faith to share.

Who was or is that person for you? Who needs you to be that person for them?

Who needs the support of hand outstretched? Who needs a tender voice? Who needs healing? Who needs the assurance of faith? Maybe it's you...

- from the ashes of death – you can rise up!
- from the pits of despair – you can rise up!
- from the grave of grief – you can rise up!
- from the chains of guilt – you can rise up!
- from the dungeon of shame – you can rise up!
- from the bed of sickness – you can rise up!
- from the prison of depression – rise up!
- from the force of addiction – you can rise up!
- from the walls of isolation – you can rise up!

"Talitha koum." Come on and rise up! Come on and rise up!