

PROPER 8, July 1, 2018, Year B

- *I want to begin by naming a challenge.* It's a challenge we *all* experience when we hear a Gospel passage like ours, today. I can put it best in the form of a question.
- As listeners, *I wonder which we find more powerful and evocative* ~ stories that focus on a *physical* healing, *and* an unexpected restoration to life of a dead person? / *Or*, are we more likely to be moved by stories laced with spiritual *symbolism*, and apparently *mythic* elements?
- *Some stories* that we hear involve *dramatic physical events*, like an unanticipated medical cure, or a person surviving a near-fatal fall off a cliff. *These are the kinds of narratives* we often find vividly presented in public media ~ like on FaceBook pages, in grocery check-out magazines, and on certain TV channels. They hook our attention, *perhaps because of* their very *implausibility*. We want to know *what happened*. And we marvel *at how—if true—things ended up coming to a good end*.
- We hear *other stories* that contain *symbolism*, and which are shaped by *religious ideas* and *mystical elements*. These may *interest* us. Yet, they can also seem a bit *distant*, and *disconnected* from our everyday experience. Though we may be bored or distressed by the *usual* patterns of our lives, *familiar patterns nevertheless shape us because they become habitual*. We then *come to see everything* through the filter of *what we already know*, rather than be *surprised* and then *intrigued* by what might be *new and different*.
- *I wonder how Mark's story-within-a-story, strikes you.* Does our Gospel reading sound like a report about something *dramatic*, and *attention-getting*, *even if* the details seem physically *implausible*? / *Or*, does our Gospel seem to you to be a *mythical religious* story, where the *symbolic*

elements *rise to the surface* and stand out, *even if* they also seem *abstract*, and *detached* from how you normally see things?

- *Obviously, our story-within-a-story* comes to us from the New Testament, from Scriptures written long ago at a very *different* time in history, and from a very *different* part of the world. This fact *creates a further challenge*. Our Gospel's rather ancient origin, and its social location in a very *different* culture, can work against our taking it seriously as *having a profound significance* for our lives.
- *After all*, here we are in the second decade of a new century, in a situation that many describe as '*post-modern*.' Our sense of relationship with much that is around us, seems *tenuous*. Like our connection *with each other*; our connection *with our community* and region; and most of all, our connection *with our government*, its leaders; *and all other public figures*, whose faces are so familiar, *but whose actual lives* are so remote from us. *All these things make it hard for us* to feel any sense of *real connection* with a Gospel story from an ancient and foreign culture, which is shaped by assumptions we don't generally share.
- *And yet... and yet*, I hope we can be open to *imagining ourselves placed somewhere within these two interwoven stories*. Given all the challenges I have already described, this will *require of us an intentional choosing*. We have to *choose* to open ourselves to these stories that Mark shares with us. For the implausible events we hear, *actually* have something to do with *who we are*, and with *how we live*. They really do! ~ *But then... how?*
- Once again, I have gone back to *a favorite source* for helping us engage in imaginative reflection, through which we might –*at least for a moment*– feel like we were *there*. And, *through which we might sense that what happened then and there, can also somehow happen to us now*. James Tissot, who had

first been a *fashionable society painter*, found that his life was turned around by the Jesus story, and then by Jesus himself. And so, as you have heard me tell you before, he dedicated a good part of the rest of his life to helping us envision what we hear and read in the Gospels. The two images I share with you today, beautifully portray the pivotal moments in our two stories ~ or, our story within a story. {And I invite you to look at them}

- Look at Jesus walking through a narrow street, heading toward the home of Jairus. A woman raises her hand toward Jesus, in the bustle of a crowd that closely surrounds him. She reaches *just to touch* the edge of his robe. She wants, as we might put it, a sacrament of his presence.
- Now, *who among us* has *never* felt *isolated*, *different* from others and, as a result, *cut off* from them, in one way or another? Who has *not* imagined or experienced *social ostracism*, seemingly perpetrated by others *because we do not fit in*. Whether *real* or not, we then feel *unfit* to be *with* those others, whose company we desire, and whose fellowship we hope for. What might change this dynamic? What might *transform* all these *broken* or *non-existent* relationships, which we feel *would be so important* to us?
- Or, look at Jesus, gently reaching down to *touch* and *grasp* the girl, whose death has led to *vigorous outward mourning*. Agonized relatives, and concerned friends, are right at hand, or lurk in the shadows. They *want*, or at least *hope for*, a sacrament of Jesus' presence.
- *Who among us* has *never* experienced the demise of some aspect of our lives? Who among us has *never* had a *failed dream*, a *blown opportunity*, a *bottomed-out investment*, whether of ideas and emotions, or of money and time? *However* these kinds of events may have impacted us, what might help move us forward, and lead us to recover of our sense of confidence

PROPER 8, July 1, 2018, Year B

and efficacy? What might *transform* how we look at everything, *even if* our outward circumstances *don't change* right away?

- These two stories, about Jairus' daughter and the woman with an infirmity, are stories *about us*, just as much as they are about *other people*, from a long ago, faraway place. And they are also stories about *how God's Spirit, through Jesus, can transform us, and our lives.*
- An important but highly symbolic key to unlocking the mystery within all this, is the number 'twelve.' As John Shea points out, "God's love, working through Jesus, has stopped the twelve-year flow of blood in the hemorrhaging woman. [A]nd [it has] started the flow of blood in the twelve-year-old girl."¹ In our Scriptures, *twelve* symbolizes wholeness, and *the Spirit's fulfillment of God's loving plans for us.* God raised up *twelve* tribes of Israel, and Jesus called *twelve* disciples who became apostles. And both symbolize us. *They prefigure* our own part in this great mystery of transformation. For God is Good. And, *all* the time!



James Tissot, *The Woman With an Issue of Blood*



James Tissot, *The Daughter of Jairus*

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.” So 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.

Notes:

¹ John Shea, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers*, Year B (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2005), p.165; punctuation altered, and emphasis added.