

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Laura Blazek - June 28th, 2015

Several weeks ago, I attended a veterinary conference in downtown Indianapolis. On my very first day there, while my luggage was taking a scenic trip to Denver, I grabbed my backpack and headed to the streets in search of any food that was larger than the tiny bag of honey roasted peanuts I was given on my flights, wasn't from a vending machine, and wouldn't be handed to me in a paper bag or placed on a plastic tray. In my wanderings, I passed St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church. In the alley beside the church there lay at least a dozen pieces of cardboard on the ground. On one of these pieces of cardboard a man was asleep. By another a man stood with his meager possessions. As I continued on, I passed person after person sitting on the sidewalks of downtown Indy holding signs requesting aid. My favorite sign read, "It's for Vodka. Now smile."

It was my favorite because it made me think. How many times had this man been asked how he would use the money that he was given so that he finally resorted to this sign? I wondered if anyone ever asked him his name.

As I stared at the remnants of the best meal I had had in a long time, my mind continued to stray back to the cardboard littered alley and the people I had passed by. I considered asking for a box and then offering it to one of them, but then I thought, 'Don't the homeless deserve more than cast-offs and leftovers?' On the way back to my hotel I passed new people with new signs. There were so many, and there was no way I could give something to everyone. I found myself paralyzed with doubt about what was the right thing to do and my conscious reaction appeared unresponsive to the need that surrounded me. Unbidden, I heard, "Talitha cum. Little girl, get up."

In the medical field we have a variety of terms to describe the level of consciousness for patients- lethargy, stupor, unresponsive, coma, moribund- each one progressively worse as a patient approaches death. Wherever the little girl in Mark's story fell on this spectrum of consciousness, two words from Jesus, "Talitha cum," opened her eyes to the world around and returned her to consciousness so that she could act.

In Mark's gospel I don't just see the healing of bodies but the healing of souls. To the woman who touched his robes he says, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace..." To

Jairus (jay-I-ruhs) he says, “Do not fear, only believe.” To the little girl he says, “Talitha cum.” Ignoring the grammatical debates, it means ‘little girl, get up.’

Jesus is speaking not only to the woman, Jairus, and the little girl but to each and every one of us who have chosen to follow Jesus and strive to live the life that Jesus calls us to live. It is our faith in Christ that has made us whole and brings us peace.

And let’s face it, being a Christian, living a Christian life can be scary. Jesus calls us stand up against injustice or as a good friend of mine once put it to become “allergic to injustice”. That can mean standing up to a majority and saying “enough”. It can mean that we have to step up and forward when everyone around us is stepping back. It means that often we have to swim upstream against the norm of society and in doing so take all the hits and pain that comes with it. But if we don’t fear and only believe then change can happen and justice can prevail.

And a Christian life is daunting. Jesus calls us to feed the hungry, tend the sick, soothe the suffering, visit the prisoners, clothe the naked, give rest to the weary, to love our neighbors as ourselves. There are so many choices, so many people in need, so many opportunities to be Christ to someone and to glorify God it seems overwhelming, and instead of being spurred into action we shut down, our conscious reaction slipping away until our Christian life has the appearance of death. We become like the little girl- appearing dead- as we find ourselves frozen, afraid to move in any direction for fear of making the wrong choice, fear of enabling, fear of too many things to list.

I experienced that in Indy when in helping one person, I found that I must neglect another. And in neglecting another it made me feel like the man on the beach surrounded by starfish that had washed onto shore. He saw another man tossing the starfish back into the sea. “Why?” he asked. “Why? You can’t save them all.” And the man, looking at the starfish in his hand replied, “It will make a difference to this one,” as he tosses the starfish back into the sea.

Talitha cum.

As we sit in our pews, our homes, our cars or as we walk down the street, Jesus calls to us, “Talitha cum”- get up. Do something, anything because it all matters. Paul says, “For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have.” As Nancy told us two weeks ago, even a tiny pebble tossed into the water causes a ripple.

One bottle of shampoo matters. One pair of socks matters. Chopping onions for Food for Friends, matters. Hammering nails on a Habitat for Humanity home or serving water to those who do matters. Stopping, looking someone in the eyes, and asking them their name,

acknowledging them as a human being rather than pretending they don't exist, matters. Whatever we do, regardless of how small or insignificant it seems to us, it makes a difference to someone, somewhere, whether we are able to see it or not. We are called to do for others what we can, when we can, and how we can.

When we see suffering around us, when we see those in need, and when we feel overwhelmed by it all because there is so much and so many like the starfish on the beach, remember this. Have faith. Don't fear, only believe. Get up. Talitha cum.

Amen.