

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B
June 28, 2009
The Reverend Mary Lee Bergeron

“Seekers”

*God of hope before us, God of healing within us, God of mercy above us,
Come be with us. Amen.*

Ps. 30; Lamentations 3:21-33; Wisdom 1:13-15. 2”23-24;
2 Cor. 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

Our scripture tells us that crowds of people follow Jesus. Most of them are seeking something like hope or love or healing. I wonder; where are the seekers today? Who are the people willing to cross boundaries; to go out of their way to see Jesus? Are we those seekers? Or is our spiritual life just too easy? Do we just come on Sunday, and then move on. Sometimes that's true of most of us. So what might cause us to become more than an observer – to become a seeker, a boundary breaker; so we can get closer to Jesus?

Many times that happens when we hurt inside from physical, emotional or spiritual pain. We as a church community have been in pain this past week as we have grieved the death of one of our parishioners, Mike Keel. This has been a difficult time. Yet, we did come together yesterday, not only to grieve but to celebrate his life. Often when we have pain & suffering, we seek relief, for we desire hope and healing.

The Episcopal Priest, Morton Kelsey in the book *Encounter with God*, said it this way. “There are times when the way (to relief) is so difficult that one must have help. At these times the person who is sincere and earnest will find someone to help him or her; if one knocks or seeks, the right doors will open.” He said, this reminded him of a story of an Indian Guru and the man who sought him out to ask how to find God. The Holy Man looked at the pilgrim and asked several times if he were really in earnest. Each time the man responded, “Yes, Yes. There is nothing in the world I want more than to find God.” Then the old teacher walked out with him to the river, looked at him sternly and said, “are you sure?” “Do you really want to find God?” “Oh yes” came the answer. The teacher plunged the man into the river and held him down under the water.. As he let him up the man was gasping for breath.

The Guru said, “Now what do you want more than anything else? The man gasped out the words, “Oh for a breath of air.” The Guru said, “When you want God that much you will find him.”

When we are gasping for breath because of great need; that is when we realize that we need God – and hopefully do what ever we need to do to break down the boundaries that keep us from spiritual help.

Just think about our Gospel reading today. Just as soon as Jesus comes to shore, gets out the boat, a large crowd gathers around him. Right up front is Jarius, a leader of the synagogue. He falls at Jesus feet and begs him to come with him to “lay your hands on my daughter who is dying, so that she may be made well, and live”. This could not have easy for Jarius – he had to be out of his comfort zone for Jesus was not well received or wanted in the synagogue – in fact, he was a threat! Yet, Jarius is so concerned about his 12 year old daughter that he breaks the boundaries; he pleads for Jesus to help!

And right at that time, something else was happening that is recorded in our Gospel. A woman, another boundary breaker, is doing the unheard of. She has had a hemorrhage for 12 years, had lots of treatment and had gotten worse not better. Sure she needs help but she considered unclean, an outcast. She shouldn't be among people. But there she breaking the boundary by being in a crowd of people not really wanting to be noticed; so she just reaches out and touches Christ's garment. Both Jarius and the woman are seekers who are willing to risk disapproval, to get close to Jesus.

Are we willing to go out of our comfort zone to seek help from Jesus? If we are, we like the woman and young girl, will receive a healing, receive new life – we will be changed in some way, physical, emotional or spiritual or all three. Very rarely does our change come to us instantaneously as the healings of Jesus. Ours comes first through prayer for guidance, then through medicine, proper health practices, through guidance, change and then more time in prayer.

The ingredient common in the healings of our Gospel reading is that of faith. The woman with the flow of blood somehow has faith that Jesus can help her for she says, “If I can but touch his clothes, I will be made well,” and so she reaches out in faith – gets close enough and touches him. Jesus who feels power leave him, turns, looks around, says “who touched me? The woman falls down in front of him and tells him the whole truth – not just about her physical problem, but all about her life. He says, “Daughter your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your disease!” This seeker has faith and receives healing.

After that Jesus goes with Jarius' to see his daughter who is dying. She does not have the faith but her Dad does, and he brings Jesus. When Jesus arrives at her house with Peter, James and John they hear that she already has died. Jesus goes in anyway, touches her and says, "Little girl, I say to you, "arise". And she does!

Why do either the woman with the hemorrhage for 12 years, or the father of the 12 year old daughter, have such faith? They did have their Jewish background, the stories they learned from Hebrew Scripture but they had recently heard from friends about the people who have been healed by the touch or words of Jesus. Perhaps God guided them, gave them a longing to seek help and strength to break the boundaries.

These seekers want to see the Jesus they keep hearing about! The one who feeds the poor, who says to the paralytic, "Get up and walk", who speaks so beautifully about blessings that they cry; the Jesus that heals lepers and send his disciples out to love and serve others; they want to see the Jesus that welcomes and loves little children but also gets angry enough to cleanse the temple; the Jesus who heals the blind and loves the woman who is known as a sinner and the Jesus who tells us to love our neighbor as our self – that is who they want to encounter.

I had the privilege of spending time one night with a group of boundary breakers. This was a group of men who had been way down, been alcoholics, which caused their families to be torn apart and jobs to be lost. They were being helped by a group to get their life back together. One of them came to the AA meeting at St. Johns and saw a group walking the labyrinth. He came out to watch. Later he told his sponsor that he would like to try to walk that circle.

The sponsor called me and we scheduled a night walk for this group to come. That night about 22 men showed up. They were nervous – this type of thing was out of their comfort zone. I gave a talk about the labyrinth and then we went out to walk. It was a beautiful night and all seemed caught up in the walk.

I had suggested that they take into the center something that was really bothering them and then when they left the center they could ask Jesus to keep that concern for them and release them from fear or worry. One by one they came out. During the refreshment time later we talked. I was touched by the depth of the sharings. They had truly broken a boundary by coming to do something totally foreign to them and because of that they experienced something new in their life. Several talked about how long it had been since they had been in a church so we talked about Jesus, about churches. They were already on

their path to wholeness through the program and hard work of change. This night however, was just a spark of joy for them, a time of closeness with Jesus.

Perhaps we can learn from these men and our gospel stories, that new life is already available to us. This new life is the energy we get from our closer time with Jesus through prayer, reflection, communion, walking with others in their pain and when we are in pain being willing to follow our own path to healing and wholeness. May we continue to be seekers and to let God guide us. *Amen*