

Grace Episcopal Church Galena Illinois

June 28, 2015

Sermon by Rev. Gloria Hopewell, D.Min.

Text: Mark 5: 21-43

Now, you may be wondering why it is that I'm wearing three stoles. Three. And not one of them is the appropriate green color for Pentecost season that matches Linda's chasuble, the prayer desk paraments. No, I have a purple stole. A red stole. And, the closest thing I have to a rainbow stole.

Well, you see, one stole just wasn't enough today. These three reflect—in part—how fast things have been happening in our world this week. In our world across these United States. In our smaller world of the Episcopal Church gathered in Salt Lake City at our General Convention—along with all of us who are following along on live streaming, Facebook, and Twitter. It has been a mind-blowing week. And I confess that my mind has been blown to bits!

This purple stole is part of an appeal by the Episcopal Women's Caucus, asking us to wear something purple this weekend to bring attention to the dearth of women in the House of Bishops. We've been ordaining women to the priesthood for 40 years and consecrating them as bishops for more than 25 years. But in 2015, there was still only one woman bishop diocesan who had enough years of experience to stand for election as Presiding Bishop. Sadly, because of the recent tragic loss of her husband, she was not in a place to consider a nomination. So, the fact is, we need more women in the "cardinal" churches. We need more women as bishops.

I also wear the purple because a new Presiding Bishop *was* elected yesterday. And it is historic. In just over a week since the overtly racist massacre nine African Americans at Bible study in their church, The Episcopal Church has elected—in a single ballot landslide—a black man, the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, bishop of North Carolina. He will be the first African American to lead this church when he is invested on November 1.

And that election took place just a day after the funeral for the senior pastor of Emanuel AME Church. And it is for these martyrs that I wear the red stole. I must tell you that I was glued to the computer, watching that streamed service, and mesmerized as our first black president delivered the eulogy. And talked about gifts of God's unearned grace more clearly than most preachers. Along with hard truths about guns and about the scourge of racism that is still alive and well in our country.

And as if that isn't enough, the Confederate flags—for so many the symbols of hate and

slavery—are coming down and the rainbow flags are going up. This last “sort of” rainbow stole is in recognition of the Supreme Court’s judgment on Friday making marriage equality the law of the land and in celebration with so many friends who are rejoicing. Allowing, at last, all people not only to have their committed relationships recognized across state lines but to afford them the benefits that accrue to all married couples. I also wear it because I can’t be part of our Diocese of Chicago entry in today’s Pride Parade.

But this is not over. Our General Convention has five more days to go, where it will consider many resolutions including whether—and how—to make the changes in the constitution or in the canons to allow same gender couples to use *Prayer Book* marriage liturgy. In addition, there are resolutions speaking to justice and reconciliation in our own country and abroad. All of these things intersect and overlap throughout our secular life and our life of faith in ways that increasingly convince me that they cannot—and must not—be separated. The pastoral, the priestly, the parochial are political. We cannot claim to follow Jesus. We cannot be his disciples without accepting that we are bound together with all other people, those like us, those very different and without acting on our faith.

Yet, what does any of this have to do with this morning’s scripture? On one level here in Mark’s Gospel—we have another miracle of healing, actually two healing stories that are

sandwiched together. But I also think these stories are about more than physical healing. I believe that they give us a broader glimpse of what God is like and of God’s Kingdom—the world as God would wish it to be for us. The world is not as God would wish, for many reasons, either in Jesus’ day or in ours. If we peer beneath the surface of this story we might just see more about God and the Kingdom.

We find here two very different, but equally desperate individuals going to Jesus for healing. One, Jairus, is a very important person in the synagogue -- he has status, family and wealth. The woman with the 12 year hemorrhage, on the other hand, is an outcast who appears to be alone, without kinship. She may have had money at one time, but has spent all of it trying to be cured of her malady. Both of these people take tremendous risks in this story. Think of the reaction the other temple officials might have had to Jairus' following an itinerant preacher who was challenging the ancient teachings! It seems to me that he could have put himself in the position of losing his rank. Yet, he was watching his only daughter die.

The woman with a hemorrhage did an equally scandalous thing. In the culture of Jesus' day and place, women did not go out in public alone. And they certainly did not presume to touch a strange man without permission. Yet "she came up in the crowd from behind and touched Jesus' garments". Jesus made no distinction between these two based on their status and wealth. He immediately agreed to go with Jairus. But when he felt the touch of the woman,

he did not let it pass without comment. He stopped and took time with her, too, despite the urgency of his other mission. Jesus shows here an acute sensitivity to all who are in need -- no one can be forgotten from God's care, no matter who they are. All are loved and worthy of healing. All may be included in God's realm.

There's also another theme in the story of the woman. As I said before, she was an outcast. She was an outcast not only because she was ill but because her particular illness, a flow of blood, made her cultically unclean. The Levitical holiness code considered blood to be the life force, so any loss of blood was unholy. To make matters worse, "unclean" persons would pollute anyone they touched. Now we can see why this woman's approach to Jesus was so scandalous. We can also see the depth of her desperation that would lead her to take such a risk. It was not only because of her illness but because she was shamed and shunned from her religious community and her social world.

Jesus called out to her, made her come forward before the crowd. He made it public. He called her "daughter", restoring her not just to health, but to wholeness and brought her back into the community as a person, beloved by God.

Of course, as this drama played out, Jairus' daughter has died. It is too late for healing, for laying on of hands. And yet, it is not too late for Jesus. He says, "Do not fear, only believe." He says, "The child is not dead, only sleeping." And he goes to her, takes her by the hand and tells her to rise. And when she does, he instructs her parents to feed her.

In this story, then, we see what God is like, what God's Kingdom is like, through the actions of Jesus. For Jesus, there is no priority of the rich and important over the poor and marginalized. He holds out his hand to both, touching them, even though doing so would spread that uncleanness to him. No, through God's healing grace, the unclean is cleansed, life in all its fullness is restored.

We do not have the same purity laws today. We know lots more about illness and treatments now. Yet, we do have wounds. Vast wounds. We have people who have been cast out, not treated with dignity, not given equal chances at life. We label people, we categorize them, we may even consider them unclean or inferior because of race or ethnicity or because of whom they love. They have struggled for equal treatment, to be full members of the community, for years—for 12 years, for 50 years, for several hundred years. These are the things that need healing if we are to become the Kingdom of God.

Like this unnamed woman, like Jairus, they have taken risks. They have reached out. But we're all in this together. We must all reach out to each other as people of God, people created in God's image. People worthy of equal love and respect. Brothers and sisters in Christ.

Maybe that is beginning to happen. With the confluence of events, the outpouring of love and celebration along with the shared grief and horror these past weeks, maybe we are seeing a new thing. A healing touch. An overflowing of grace. The movement of the Spirit.

I wrote on Facebook last night about singing “The Canticle of the Turning” here last Advent. Remember it? The refrain (if President Obama can sing in a sermon, so can I):

My heart shall sing of the day you bring.
Let the fires of your justice burn.
Wipe away all tears,
For the dawn draws near,
And the world is about to turn.

Do you suppose the turning has begun? Could it be?

Amen.