

Jairus seems like a good fellow. He's a town booster. He's a faithful man. He's the leader of the local synagogue; perhaps in our day he might have been a chairperson of the board of deacons.

I think it's fair to say he's respected. And credentialed. And he's got access. When his child gets very, very sick, he intends to put his well-earned access to use. He finds Jesus, offers his petition, and the two men, along with a swelling crowd depart for Jairus' home.

As you think about Jairus, I want you to ask yourself a question. If somebody you cared for was sick, and if you had access to get them resources, and fast, would you do the same thing as Jairus?

As the crowd makes its way to Jairus' house, it grows larger and larger, and the people push in on Jesus, anxious to be near him, to see him, to be present in all of this power, and newness, and excitement.

We meet a second character. Well actually, it's hard to say meet, because we don't get her name. We are introduced to a woman who is described not by her name, nor by her role in the world, nor by a gift that distinguishes her, not even by her association with a spouse or relative. We're introduced to her with a description of the thing that presents her to the world as being less than whole: a form of chronic hemorrhaging, which not only impedes her physical health, but is also destructive to her social health, because of purity rules.

Since it's June, I'm going to call her June. I'm giving June a name, because she's somebody I want you to meet, and we cannot ever meet our neighbors if we refuse to deny their humanity. So...Sardis meet June, and June meet Sardis!

It's evident that June is in a very different space than Jairus. June does not command the same kind of respect in the public square – even as a prosperous woman (we know she's prosperous because she can afford healthcare), June cannot, nor will she ever command the same credentials and access as Jairus.

But there is a commonality. Both Jairus and June faith in God's healing in the presence of Jesus.

And I feel so much empathy for June. Because right in front of her, right in front of her, in the person of Jesus, is the answer to her prayers. Twelve years of patience; twelve years of dismissal; twelve years of disappointment; twelve years of being your own booster and advocate. She is as worthy, and as authentic as anyone to pursue Jesus with urgency. And yet she lives in a world that marginalizes her to such an extent, that even in this situation, she is filled with trepidation.

Surely, it's too bold to simply jump the line and introduce myself, right? Surely, there's somebody who should go ahead of me, right? Surely, I can't impose on this man, right? I mean, really, who am I?

Hmm...but maybe, maybe, if I just touched his robe that wouldn't be so bold, so audacious, so beyond my station, right? So...she reaches out...

And immediately she is well. An instant transformation. A surge of energy. Possibility turns into reality. A lifetime of joy is super-charged into a millisecond.

Jesus feels the surge, too! If we're in a hurry, or if we decide that Mark's is a very gruff, harsh story, we may think Jesus asks, "WHO TOUCHED ME? WHO DID THAT? OOOOOOOOOO....YOU ARE GONNA GET IT, WHOEVER YOU ARE!!!!"

Resist that urge. Please! I think Jesus is SO moved, SO curious, SO transformed by this experience that he says, "Woah! Did you feel that? We gotta stop everything right now, and I need to connect with this person, and reflect on these remarkable events." And that's just what he does!

June comes to Jesus in fear and trembling. I think this is more akin to the fear and trembling of shepherds keeping watch by night in Luke's gospel. When one is overwhelmed by the power and presence of God, it is a fearful and terrifying thing, because such things are beyond comprehension. June tells Jesus that she believed by simply touching his garments she would be made well. And Jesus is amazed. He tells her it's that very faith that has made her well; the same healing faith, I might add, of friends who lowered their paralyzed friend through a roof, and of a Centurion who worried for his servant.

I think the most remarkable thing about this story is the flexibility and adaptability of Jesus. Jesus has the power and presence to affect healing in anyway he sees fit. And in this instance, he opens himself to the beauty of somebody else using him as the vessel of healing. How many healing authorities, in any generation, offer healing outside of hierarchical means?

What happens next illustrates my point. The narrative shifts back to Jairus. The excitement of June's healing is tempered by the delay it has caused: Jairus' daughter appears to have died. And while Jairus is a

man of deep faith, he's also a product of systems. Jairus can easily comprehend that Jesus has the ability to heal his daughter. What he cannot comprehend is the idea that Jesus, through the power of God, can do so out of sequence. The process Jairus initiates, that is his exercise in gaining access to Jesus; the logistics of getting to the house; the navigating the crowds in a timely manner; even the progression of his daughter's sickness itself; none of this determines God's ability or desire for healing.

So...even in the presence of Jesus, even after having seen the beauty and hope of June's story, even having access to every resource in the world, Jairus cannot imagine his daughter's capacity for life.

But Jesus doesn't operate within the framework of privilege systems; Jesus operates with the power and presence of a transformative, loving, creative, world-changing God. And a sleeping girl once more becomes a lively child.

My purpose today is not to diminish or even admonish Jairus. He and his family were the recipients of God's love and care. And I feel pretty confident that his family reciprocated the healing they had found to others. I don't think we'd still be telling the story if they didn't.

I think, instead, the story of Jairus helps us to better see June, and for that matter, his daughter, too. And we didn't give her a name either. Let's call her May. Neither May nor June were afforded an accessible, consistent, public space or voice to pursue the presence of Jesus. One had to be creative, the other had to rely on the diligence and persistence of a parent.

But Jesus delighted in the wellness, the wholeness, the affirmation, the empowering, the vitality of each of these persons society pushed to the margins. Not to mention, May and June's desire for healing, for connection, for access is no less than anybody else's. Mark's gospel reminds us that the Kingdom of God has come near. That means God is super-excited to be made known, to be present, to affect change for everybody, in every time, and in every place.

Most of us here at Sardis, as people of economic means, and as people connected to a vibrant faith community, are fortunate to have the experience of access in our faith. Not necessarily in every way and instance, but at least in many, we've been afforded access to moments of spiritual healing. And lots of times those experiences are similar to Jairus: faithful people, undergirded in a system, pursuing healing with the expectation that such healing will take shape in traditional, familiar ways. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Sardis should be a community where God's presence and God's possibilities can be consistently accessed, realized, and even expected.

But it can't happen in a vacuum. And it can't just be stale and predictable. The love and presence of God is both available to AND pursues all of humanity. We need to be keenly aware of the times, places, and spaces where our systemic and programmatic practice of faith prevents the organic movement of the Spirit, and the healing that accompanies it. Yes, God wants to work with and through the Jairuses of the world. But God's also eager to be present with May, and June, and all the people whose voices get lost in systems of limited access.

Friends, the kingdom of God has come near. And not just for me and you. It's come for all. May we always, always, always be a people who

Her Name Was June
Bob Stillerman
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 8, 6/27/2021
Mark 5:21-43



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

seek to make its access known; and who seek to bring its presence to those who need to feel it most.

May it be so, and may it be soon!

Amen.