

Prelude: "Trust and Obey" [Annie Schulz]

Gathering Thoughts, Call to Worship & Prayer: [Doug Schulz]

We have arrived at our worship time for the final Sunday of June. Summer is fully upon us, with blossoms in gardens (thanks to our various Grace gardeners for making this place look great all around outside) ... those many blossoms cheering us on into the hot season. And I believe a wave of muggy weather is about to let us know what this season often feels like here in Southern Ontario.

Also, we are aware that this time of year takes us close to Canada Day. May this year's commemoration of our nation's confederation into a country named Canada remind us of the First Nations people who were here from long ago. May we consider how to be knowledgeable and responsible in relations with indigenous peoples. I'll speak to this challenge and opportunity – and other Canadian ventures for us to celebrate and commit to - in next week's reflection devotional.

This past week was a difficult one for some of our church members. Gerry Froese, the middle son of Erna and the late Jake Froese had his funeral on Monday after dying from cancer the week before. We hold in our hearts Erna and her sister Margaret Heinrichs, the dear aunt of Gerry and his brothers Mark and Gordon. Our Call to Worship today will be a moment of silent prayer in honour of Gerry Froese, and of other loved ones we are remembering just now. In this silence, let's also say a heart-felt quiet prayer for family members and friends living with grief – sorrows from the past, and present and those yet to come. So, enter into a silent space for a moment, and then I'll read an Opening Prayer by Rev. Elizabeth Dilley of the United Church of Christ.

[Silence]

Compassionate God,
the wind of your Spirit is the very sign of life
for all who long for you.
One breath from you and we are rescued
from the arid valley of dry bones,
given muscles and sinews and joy with which to praise you,
and filled with the holy hope you grant to all your faithful children.
Let our whole lives be filled with the life-breath of the Spirit,
that what has lain dormant may burst into bloom,
and what looks to us to be death
may be revealed as but sleep
before the emergence of new life. Amen.

Hymn:

“We Sing to You, O God”

[Voices Together #80]

*We sing to you, O God, the Rock who gave us birth.
Let our rejoicing sing your name in all the earth.
To you, O God, let songs be raised, in joyful hymns, our feast of praise.*

*We wandered far from home out in a desert land.
You shielded with your love, our fearful pilgrim band.
You kept us safe within your arms, and sheltered us against the storm.*

*You bear us through the world, an eagle to her young,
who rises on her wings and bears us toward the sun.
We ride the vaults of light and air, and trust in your unfailing care.*

*O God, eternal God, we hide within your wings,
The everlasting arms to whom our praises ring.
Your word is true, your way is just, you are the God in whom we trust.*

Scripture:

Psalm 130

[Ester Funk]

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

2 Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

8 It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Prayers of the People

[DS]

Join your hearts with mine as I offer prayerful thoughts adapted from a beautiful prayer written by Rev. Terri Pilarski. She captures so well the spirit of the biblical text I'll be preaching about today.

God of all new things, God of
this season of fragrant flowers,
God of hope and new life,
Bless us, we pray, this day.

Creator God from whom
all life springs forth
We give You thanks
Come, one and all,
Celebrate and rejoice!

Celebrate and rejoice -
The old has passed away
Everything has become new!
God of all things passing away, God
of old and yesterday,
the One who is with us
in our despair and fear.
God who sighs and weeps, with us,
God who wipes away our tears.

Loving God, we offer up these prayers of concern this day -
for those struggling to rebuild lives
from natural disasters,
and for those recovering from human disasters,
also for those struggling with illness and grief.

Hear us when we pray. Incline
your ear to our words,
to our shouting cries, or mournful whispers,
our stunned wordless, wondering silence.
Be gentle with our suffering
with our sorrows and losses,
and especially when our hard
hearts close us off to you.
Be gentle. Be gentle.
O God, our God!

gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" 32 He looked all around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

35 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?" 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." 37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 40 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. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" 42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Reflection: "Words Touching on Power" [DS]

The summer season is now fully upon us with the long days of heat and light, so we can all the more enjoy how nature is becoming 'full-blown powerful-green'. Spring budding and flowering has expanded into the (hopefully adequately rain-fed) time where a great variety of things can continue to grow healthily; and when - whether or not we are gardeners anymore - we have begun already to think in terms of harvest. We received some photos this past week from our daughter-in-law, who took some "selfies" with our grandchildren standing between rows of strawberry plants. They had big smiles - and red juice oozing out of their mouths - as they posed with half-full quart baskets, which we took as evidence, of course, that they were diligently helping mommy.

Our preaching theme at Grace this season is "Growing in God: Abiding". We do abide with joy, as I'm suggesting, in sensing the fullness of nature's beauty in any season, and appreciating particularly over the summertime the generosity of nature's provision for our human needs. Of course, human need is much more than bodily desires such as yearning for a mouthful of strawberry sweetness or

hungering daily for a bellyful of bread. We have relational needs as well. We have soul needs, too; that is, spiritual hungers that want filling. We abide within powerful needs of many kinds.

In the Psalm read earlier by Ester, the writer cries to God “out of the depths”! We hear the desperation in that voice, a sincere supplication for a healed heart, a pure conscience, a restored and settled soul. Assurance of redemption. The sense of sustaining and inspiring hope. The writer speaks of *waiting* for God to act, and expresses total confidence that hope is surely found in the “word” that God will provide. The spiritual life is about waiting, about abiding in the promise that it is possible to find within ourselves God’s touch of power.

The central idea in the collection of writings called “The Bible” – which means “The Book” - is that God can be experienced as “The Word” that changes life. The “Word of God” teaches and illustrates over and over that a human encounter with God’s ‘voice’ of presence and power can create miracles of transformation, as the woman in the Gospel story I read experiences even before Jesus speaks to her. In fact, it’s an inner voice the impoverished woman hears that motivates her to have the courage to believe in some richness of mercy and healing Jesus would give her, if she could just reach out to touch Jesus when he’s rushing by on his way to help someone else.

Let’s consider the deep meaning of the details of this gospel event where two people are healed – a young girl and an adult woman - more carefully. The story begins with Jesus arriving at a shoreline packed with people waiting to have contact with him. Hmm, a shoreline? Jesus spends a lot of time and does a lot of teaching on shorelines. Jewish people did not particularly enjoy being out in boats, actually. Fisherfolk were the exception; they braved the dangers of venturing into open water in order to make a living. So, here is Jesus, once again on a shoreline, on the edge between what people saw as safe territory and what most regarded as a high-risk venture probably not worth taking.

So, here Jesus is being confronted by the miracle-seeking attention of a multitude of people at the edge of their sense of security. Consider: What if Jesus said to them: Sure, I’ll deal with your problem for you. All you need to do is come out into a boat with me so we can get away from all this clamour and I can help you personally. How many people would be willing to do that? If I really want help from God, how

much of a risk am I prepared to take that God might ask something of me that will stretch the edges of my safety zone? That will cause me to grow inner strength?

Well, Jesus doesn't push off into the water in a boat with anyone. But he does create a genuine faith-testing situation for a man named Jairus, an official of the synagogue. This means Jairus is a very important person in the community, not someone you want to cross up in any way. Someone whose word you will trust and obey, simply because of his position in the religious establishment of the day. The challenge, of course, is: Will Jairus trust and obey Jesus?

Jesus listens to Jairus' pleading voice crying out his hope for Jesus to come lay hands on his dying child, his 12-year-old daughter. Jairus absolutely believes that a touch from Jesus will save his precious little girl. So Jesus goes with Jairus on a mission of healing, as a crowd of people gathers around, follows along, and no doubt impresses loudly upon Jesus the important concerns of their own lives and of their loved ones. Imagine the cacophony of voices! And one can almost feel shoulders roughly rubbing, elbows bumping into ribs, toes stubbing against heels, hands reaching or grabbing here and there... not to mention the smells of bodies and breaths! Picture that rag-tag jostling army of beggars and bidders and bad-tempered hangers-on, all chasing after a personal miracle, or at least after a sign that God's Great Power has come to town.

Let's remind ourselves of the mission Jesus is on: Go to the home of Jairus. Touch his daughter. See her get healed. Restore life to where it once was. Remember I said the story starts on a shoreline? On an edge? Actually, think of what Jairus is doing. He's a religious leader. Mark in his gospel has already told us that the religious leaders in general are supremely suspicious of Jesus. He's been identified as a blasphemous teacher, a lawless leader, and a follower of Satan, no less! Not to mention he frequently eats and drinks with sinners! Yet, here is Jairus leading Jesus through a crowd on the way to his own home. Jairus has stepped into a dangerous boat. He has set sail on an unpredictable sea. He does not know what this encounter with Jesus will cost him in terms of reputation or anything else, but he's willing to pay the price. After all, what motivates his heart the most - his child's life - is at stake. And so there they go, Jesus and Jairus. The rabble-rouser and the religious rule-keeper. What are the chances life will ever be the same, no matter what happens?

While on that journey, Jesus is interrupted. What's this? An unclean woman! Reaching out of the crowd to touch Jesus' clothing. Touch! My God! No self-respecting woman would touch a man in public in that society, especially not a man of religion – a radical one or a regular one. But this woman, whose menstrual flow could not be controlled by any kind of medicine so that she had gone broke from trying to buy a cure and by now was cursed in the eyes of everyone around her because to have blood-flow like this meant you were never ever allowed into the synagogue let alone never ever going to find a man willing to marry you. The woman was a complete outcast, seen as a sinner bent down under the judgement of God, now proving to be a total fool because she dared to believe that she had the right to reach out her hand to a holy-man for healing.

Yes, this woman innocently interrupts Jesus in the middle of his essential life-saving mission aimed toward someone else. She touches his cloak, just hoping for a brush of pure power. Well, Jesus feels that power flowing from him to someone in great need of help. He stops. Turns. Seeks a face. Wants to know the story. What must Jairus have thought? Here is Jesus the Healer - who Jairus has convinced to complete a miracle at his holy house – stopping dead in his tracks because a lowly woman, a cursed woman, a meaningless woman has got Jesus' attention. Dare we consider that at some earlier point Jairus might have stood in the doorway of his synagogue looking down the street to see this same “scum of the earth” bloody bag-lady in the distance? Could it be Jairus sneered, just imagining the sins in her youth that must have brought her to this place of ruin?” She'd been like this for twelve years! Probably from the time of her first period. Perhaps from the time of a miscarriage. Was there ever a marriage involved? Maybe a marriage that failed? We are not told. We just see a woman possibly arriving soon at mid-age (which was early 30s in those days) with a reputation as ugly as the rejection she felt within herself every day of her life.

We don't know what Jairus' attitude was toward the people society saw as unclean or unfit for a blessing. We just know that Jesus made Jairus stand there while his daughter is approaching death, waiting as Jesus takes time to discover fully what's going on with this woman. And what is going on with her? Or, rather, within her?

Well, let's consider the inner power this woman has found, even before her miracle of healing. Imagine the way she summons courage to reach out on that day. She has lost everything else in life, but today she discovers that within her lies the seed

of the kingdom of God this Jesus has talked about. What is born within her is the assurance that a touch, a simple touch, will accomplish her total completeness as a human being, as a woman, as a citizen, as a soul. Having come to that conclusion already beforehand, she reaches out.

Spiritual psychologist John Sanford writes: “The Kingdom of heaven is the reality in a [person’s] life which causes [her] whole personality, and the outer fabric of [her] life as well, to achieve completeness... It is through the acceptance of the inner power for growth that our lives rise and become fulfilled.” [*The Kingdom Within*, p.45]

Indeed, the woman, having trusted in that word of God called Jesus, accepts that the kingdom Jesus speaks about is in fact within her, she has the inner power for growth, life, fulfillment. And, believing that, she reaches, touches, and then is healed in every way; made complete. Jesus says to her: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed.” We have no idea what happens to this woman after the encounter with Jesus. But her life would have changed completely.

Now, her story was just an interruption in something else Jesus was up to, right? Let’s get over to Jairus house now! Oh, wait. No point. Jairus’ little twelve-year-old girl is dead, they tell him. But Jesus says: “Do not fear. Only believe.” Here is Jesus, telling the religious man to have the faith of a woman he would not have dared or cared to meet before that day. Jesus has elevated her spiritual example, and now looks at the despairing Jairus and says, trust what you know in your inner spirit. That’s what brings you to hear my word and reach for my authority over death. Trust your inner awareness of the power of faith. And the story unfolds from there. Jesus goes to the house, enters the room with the death-bed, takes the girl by the hand, lifts her up alive and well, and tells her parents that by now she must be hungry.

Hunger. It’s an awful thing where people are starving. It’s a beautiful thing when it reminds us that we are alive. That we are capable of being filled. And that we are able to fulfill our lives also by feeding others what they need. As Jesus does – from offering daily bread to raising people from the dead.

This little sequence of gospel stories about shorelines, about the edge between complete curse and total healing, and between the bleak darkness of a child’s death and the great light of future possibility when she is raised up ... this is one of my favorite parts of the entire Bible. Oh, and it should not be lost on us that the girl

Jesus saves from death is a twelve-year-old, a girl-child passing over a seashore as she is about to become a woman within that culture, about to take her place in synagogue and society, about to fulfill her purposes in adult life. All this would have been lost had she died. But Jesus, in this case, brings this child to life.

These stories remind me to ask myself: What seashore am I standing on, what place between fear and faith? Between hesitation and faithful following of Jesus? How is the voice of God within calling me to greater growth, deeper healing, far-reaching vision about my life purpose – in my family, in church, in friendships and community and world? How can I touch the world with God’s kin-dom life, while I am given time?

And what power of God can touch the world through this church, through those who are known as people of Grace?

Hymn of Response: “The Church of Christ, in Every Age” [VT #395]

*The church of Christ, in ev’ry age beset by change but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage, and keep on rising from the dead.*

*Then let the servant church arise, a caring church that longs to be
a partner in Christ’s sacrifice, and clothed in Christ’s humanity.*

*We have no mission but to serve in full obedience to our Lord,
to care for all, without reserve, and spread his liberating word.*

Benediction: [DS]

Go, confident in the knowledge of God’s steadfast love for you,
assured of the healing touch of Jesus upon you and
emboldened by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit within you.

Sending Hymn: “Spirit of Life” [VT #368]

*Spirit of Life, come unto me.
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;
move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.*