

“SILENT SUFFERING”
Karen F. Bunnell
Elkton United Methodist Church
August 2, 2020

Psalm 130

Mark 5:21-43

Well, here we are at the beginning of August, having just wrapped up about month four of living in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. Life has changed for us in so many ways, it’s hard to count. But one thing seems certain for a lot of us – we’re spending more time than usual on our computers. I’ve noticed a sharp uptick in the amount of things people are posting on-line.

Some of those things are sweet – pictures of children and grandchildren, puppies and kittens, rainbows, vegetables from gardens, pictures of oceans and mountains, and so on. Those make you smile.

Other things are inspiring. I have loved looking at the posts of many families in our church who have come up with creative things for their families to do during this pandemic – scavenger hunts, hikes, baking and cooking – it’s been wonderful to watch families draw closer together during a situation that could have pulled them apart.

Unfortunately, there has also been a rise in what I call “irritating” posts – mostly political. Now I have nothing against stating one’s political views. I do have a big problem with posts that label everyone of a certain political party evil or stupid. Whatever happened to civil discourse?

Finally, there are, what I like to call, profound posts – posts that are usually quotes, quotes that inspire you, make you think, make you remember what is good and kind and helpful. I know this might seem silly, but a number of people posted things about Regis Philbin this week after his death last weekend, and one of them was that he never let his friends fail. He always had their back – and that’s in the middle of an entertainment industry that is usually a “dog-eat-dog” world.

That’s inspiring. There were plenty of John Lewis quotes as well, and many others. Quotes that, at least for me, make me stop scrolling down the computer screen, and instead ponder them, let them touch me.

Well, such was the case when a quote I had first read probably twenty years ago reappeared on Facebook recently. The first time I came upon it was in a sermon by one of my favorite preachers, Barbara Brown Taylor. It touched me when I first read it back then, and it touches me even more in these tough times, because it is so true, and it goes like this:

“Be kind. Everyone you meet is fighting a battle.”

“Be kind. Everyone you meet is fighting a battle.”

I remember when I first read it wondering more about it – wondering who was the original author of the quote, and so I did a search and in the process discovered an interesting story.

Google identified the author of the quote as a man named John Watson, but right after that citation came an essay talking about the quote, so I read that too. The man who wrote the essay said that the quote had intrigued him as well the first time he had encountered it, just as it had me. He couldn't stop thinking about it, and as a matter of fact, couldn't quite believe it. Everyone fighting a battle? “It couldn't be,” he thought.

So he went about trying to disprove Watson's theory. He says, “I thought of all the people I knew. I thought of the members of my family, my friends, my parent's friends and all the people we were acquainted with. Surely, there must be an exception to the rule, I thought. Surely there must be someone who wasn't

fighting a battle of even the tiniest sort and therefore was not in need of my kindness. But there was not.”

Well friends, if this morning’s Gospel lesson is any indication, Watson is right – because in today’s lesson from Mark, both Jairus and the unnamed woman are fighting battles. Jairus’ battle is fear and desperation and despair – for his daughter is dying and he wants more than anything, for her to be healed. On top of that, he’s battling pressure from the religious authorities of his day, because he knows that the only place he can turn, the only person to whom he can turn is Jesus, and that will put him in hot water with them. If he turns to Jesus, she might live. If he succumbs to their pressure and doesn’t go to Jesus, she will surely die. Jairus is a man fighting the battle of his life.

At about the time Jairus approaches Jesus, so too does someone else, a woman who’s fighting her own battle – a battle with sickness that has plagued her for twelve long years. And, like Jairus, that’s not her only battle. Not only is she desperately ill, she’s also been cast out of society because of it, for the law rendered her unclean because of her hemorrhaging – so people stayed away from her. On top of that, she’s already a second class citizen because of her gender – so society would expect Jesus to tend to Jairus’ needs (a man’s needs) before hers.

So that poor woman is, lost in a huge crowd, weak from suffering for twelve long years, desperately alone and lonely, searches for the One who is her last, best hope – Jesus.

Thanks be to God, both of them chose not to be silent in their suffering, but went to Jesus, and thanks be to God, they got to him against all odds. He heard their cries, but more than that, I think he knew the courage it had taken them to come to him. He knew how hard it had been, what it had cost them, and he affirmed them for who they were, what they had gone through, and the faith they had shown in reaching out to him for his healing touch.

And that, indeed, is just what he offered both of them – healing. Jesus literally brought Jairus' daughter back to life when everyone around her was sure she was dead. He set her on her feet and made her whole. But he also healed her father, Jairus – his battle with fear, despair and peer pressure came to an end. All was right with the world now, and Jairus went away from that encounter with Jesus a changed man, a new man.

Likewise the unnamed woman. Not only did Jesus heal her body, but he affirmed her worth – which is something she desperately needed. He called her “sister”- he gave her a name when society had turned away from her; he affirmed

the courage it took for her to reach out for help; and he listened to her when she poured out her heart and told him, as the text says, “the truth” about herself. That woman went away after touching Jesus and being touched and healed by him, totally changed – in body, mind and spirit.

My friends, if John Watson’s statement that everyone you meet is fighting a battle is true, and I believe it is, then there’s a very good chance that all of you watching and listening today are. Oh, we know some of the battles that are being fought in the lives of some of our brothers and sisters, because we see their names on our prayer concerns list. But there are so many more battles being waged that we don’t know about – burdens that are being borne in private silence.

Battles with illness, battles with family or friends, battles because of strained or broken relationships, battles with addiction, battles with pain of all kinds. And all of those are battles enough, but put on top of that a battle we’re all fighting – a battle with the coronavirus pandemic. We’re all fighting it, and it is taking a toll on us.

There is always a underlying layer of fear for ourselves and those we love – fear of contracting the virus – but there’s so much more. After this had gone on for

so long (and sadly with no end in sight), there's an undercurrent of tension, anxiety, irritability, even depression over it.

We're tired of it – we're tired of the masks, tired of not being able to hug our friends, to be in groups; tired of worrying about money and jobs; stressed about what to do about going back to school and coming back to church in person.

And all of these battles are taking a toll on us. Turn on the news and it seems daily we see incidents occurring – people snapping at each other, losing patience, treating others badly. I read a very sad essay this week written by a restaurant manager who saw one of her servers verbally abused by a customer. The customer's order was not correct, and even though the server apologized and the manager apologized, and the order was corrected, and the customer was given the food for free, she still kept up the verbal abuse of everyone around her.

Is she an evil person? I don't know her, so I can't say. What I can say is that this battle we're all in – this pandemic battle – can take a toll on us, so my prayer is that we will not try to keep it all in and suffer in silence. For when we do, Satan will step in and do his worst. He will chip away, make things seem worse than they are, and worst of all, he will raise the possibility in our hearts that our situation is hopeless and will not get better.

Instead, I pray that we will take a lesson from Jairus and the unnamed woman – that we will turn to Jesus, for more than anything, he wants to touch us, heal us and carry us into a new future. He wants to help us bear the burden of whatever battle we're in.

All we need to do is let him. All we need to do is let down our guard, give up our pride, let go of our fear and laid down our burdens at his feet – and he will be there to carry us on into a new future.

You know, a writer named Geoffrey Posegate tells about how, when he was a small child, he took swimming lessons. And though he would gladly get in the pool, he would never let go of the edge in the deep end. He was too afraid. He said, “While my swimming instructor assured me I had no reason to fear, I had to choose to push off from the side of the pool.” Likewise, he continued, “Jesus invites our trust and our decision to reach beyond our fears,” and I would add, “to give our battles to him.”

Geoffrey Posegate is right. We have no need to suffer in silence, to wage whatever battles we are fighting alone and afraid – for Jesus does “invite our trust and our decision to reach beyond our fears.”

So, the question is: Will you do that? Will you trust Jesus to help you with whatever battle you're fighting today? You don't need to suffer in silence any longer, for he is right there ready to bear your burden for you, and help you move forward into a new and whole life. He wants so desperately to help you. All you have to do is let him. May today be the day you lay your burden at his feet and know fully the reality of the words we're about to sing:

Shackled by a heavy burden, neath a load of guilt and shame,

Then the hand of Jesus touched me, and now I am no longer the same.

I pray that, this morning, along with Jairus and the unnamed woman in Mark's gospel, you will lay your burden down, and this song will be your song today. May it be so.

Amen.