



June 30, 2024

*Mark 5:21-43*

## **Rev. Paul Gehrs**

**Assistant to the Bishop, Justice and Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations**

### **Mark 5:21-43**

*When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him.*

*And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."*

*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?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing*

*loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 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. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

## **Land Acknowledgement**

*I am speaking to you today from Treaty One Territory: the land of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and homeland of the Métis Nation.*

*The ELCIC acknowledges that its buildings and ministries, from coast to coast to coast, are on traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples.*

*The call to reconciliation and renewed relationships between Indigenous – non-Indigenous Peoples is a fundamental element of work for social and ecological justice in the Canadian context today. God is calling on the church to decolonize its life and work. At the heart of this work is building relationships with neighbours.*

~

My name is Paul Gehrs. My pronouns are he/him, and I serve as Assistant to the Bishop for Justice and Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations at the national office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC).

On this Sunday June 30, I wish you a meaningful and restorative Canada Day. I hope the day offers you time for reflection on what it means to love your country, and what it means to be involved in God's work of transforming neighbourhoods into communities of true justice, peace, caring, and love. I also wish you a blessed conclusion to Indigenous History Month and Pride Month, including a renewed awareness of the work to be done for truth, reconciliation, and healing in many aspects of Canadian life.

Early in life, one thing I was taught is that being a disciple means following Jesus on a journey. At first, this meant the disciples are the good-guys, and to be a good disciple I should be like the disciples in the Bible. As time went on, and I continued to encounter the stories in the Gospels, I learned that the disciples are far from perfect:

They fall asleep when they are asked to pray.

They try to keep some people away from Jesus (you know the list: children, women, gentiles, hungry crowds).

They fight over who is most important.

They ask the wrong questions and often don't understand the answers.

They brag about their commitment and run away when they are scared.

When they encounter good news, they hide behind locked doors.

In contrast, Jesus often points to those who are marginalized as the ones who are the models of faith and discipleship.

Children, women, and gentiles,

The hungry, the hurting, and the unclean.

In today's reading, the attention of Jesus is on a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years and on a 12-year-old girl who is sick to the point of death. Jesus is launched on a journey toward the ailing child by the desperate, persistent, rigorous pleas of her father. The long-suffering woman advocates for herself, by working her way through the crowd from behind Jesus and touching his clothes. Her journey is also desperate, persistent, and rigorous.

When Jesus stops to find out "who touched me," the disciples say it is impossible to tell. They see only a crowd and no solution. But Jesus insists. Knowing the identity of the one has been healed is important. The woman finds the courage to face Jesus and tell him the whole truth. Jesus says to her "your faith has made you well; go in peace...." The woman's courage frees Jesus to continue his journey and keeps things moving forward for the girl who also needs help.

News arrives that the child has died. People begin to say "don't bother Jesus anymore. There is no hope." But Jesus continues his journey to the child. When Jesus says there is hope, people laugh. As you know, Jesus continues on, and raises the child from the dead. What a moment for the youth and her family.

On May 16, 2024, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) released a new logo and tagline. This logo and tagline are the result of broad consultation across the church and the development of a new vision statement. They say a lot about who the ELCIC is as a church today.

The new logo draws on several key visual elements, including:

- a dove and olive branch, symbolizing love, peace, hope, and the Holy Spirit;
- the cross, which is at the heart of our faith, embodying Christ, and forgiveness; and
- an open hand, representing God's grace, welcoming, and openness.

Visually the logo comes together in a modern, contemporary design signifying energy and forward momentum.

Our new tagline – ***Living Out God’s Grace & Unconditional Love*** – engages us, reminding us of our call as a church and as individuals.

As a community of people, guided by our faith, we strive to embody grace and unconditional love in everything we do.

This simple, memorable statement reminds us of our commitment to embrace diversity, foster an environment that is inclusive, and to nurture the life-giving relationships that reflect the transformative power of grace and love.

With ***Living Out God’s Grace & Unconditional Love*** in mind, I offer you the following observations:

Jesus upheld the dignity of the woman and the girl. Even while on the important mission to heal the child of the leader of the synagogue, Jesus stopped and insisted on knowing the identity and the story of the woman. For the girl, Jesus ensures her dignity and privacy by going to her with a small delegation: the girl’s parents and only 3 disciples. This resurrection and healing are about the needs of this child; it is not a show for the crowds. We are called to offer dignity and respect for each person, their identity, and their story.

I can’t help but notice the disciples in this story keep saying “it can’t be done.” “We can’t tell who touched you.” “We can’t keep going now that someone died.” “We don’t have hope.” Sometimes, “it can’t be done” means we need to do something else. But sometimes “it can’t be done” means endorsing the status quo and letting ourselves off the hook for making needed changes.

As disciples, we are invited to join God’s mission to love, heal, and save the world. Rather than saying “it can’t be done...,” we are invited to ask:

Where are people being fed? Who needs to be fed?

Where are people being healed? Where is healing needed?

Where are people being welcomed? Who needs a place to belong?

A verse from the hymn “Now the Green Blade Rises” comes to mind:

*When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,  
your touch can call us back to life again,  
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been;  
love is come again like wheat arising green.<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup>Text: John MacLeod Campbell Crum, music: French Carol, Evangelical Lutheran Worship #379.

Part of working for justice and peace in our particular contexts, is recognizing our own need for healing and transformation. When it comes to addressing my own grief, fear, anxiety, guilt, and pain, there are times when I need to pay more attention to Jesus coming to transform me, and times when I need to muster the courage, effort, and resolve to focus on the healing ways of Jesus; I need to continue the journey with energy and forward momentum.

Finally, I want to point out a story-telling detail. The woman was hemorrhaging for twelve years and the child was twelve years old. In a way, the woman and the girl lived parallel lives: the woman has suffered throughout the child's life. The child had a caring father who would do almost anything to save his child. The woman, on her own to find a way of healing. Their lives are connected on this day by their need for Jesus and by the actions of Jesus.

Twelve is a number with meaning:

twelve tribes of Israel,

twelve gates to the Temple

twelve apostles,

twelve kinds of fruit on the tree of life in Revelation<sup>2</sup>

...and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Let there be greening.

In the Jewish tradition, age 13 years old is a common time bat mitzvah and bar mitzvah. It is the age at which one is recognized as an adult. So this "little girl" is at the very precipice of being an adult woman.

On Pentecost, the Spirit liberated the disciples from hiding behind locked doors and sent them into the streets as witnesses to God's love. Empowered by the Spirit, they found ways to communicate, to feed, to heal, and to love. They were sent to all the world.

As a community of people, guided by our faith, we strive to embody grace and unconditional love in everything we do. The Holy Spirit comes also to us: to liberate us from our fears, to send us into the places God needs us to be, and to support us in *living out God's grace & unconditional love*.

May God bless you on this journey.

---

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 22