

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed. The following sermon was written by Pastor David Pfeiffer of West Columbia, South Carolina. And the text for this morning's meditation comes from Mark chapter 5, verses 21 through 34.

And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. 22 Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet 23 and implored him earnestly, saying, "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." 24 And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. 25 And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, 26 and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. 27 She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. 28 For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." 29 And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30 And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" 31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" 32 And he looked around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. 34 And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

The test involved a bunch of young children, a marshmallow, and patience. They called it "the Marshmallow Test." In 1970, Stanford University conducted a social exercise with children ages 4 through 6. Each child was offered a marshmallow and a promise. They were offered one marshmallow that was theirs to eat, but if they waited 15 minutes without eating it, they would be given a second marshmallow. It was a test of patience measured in marshmallows.

The results showed that only about 1/3 of the children were able to wait the 15 minutes and get the second marshmallow. But this is not so surprising. It is even less surprising today, in the age of the touch screen smart phone. Who wants to wait for something better when we can be instantly gratified now? We are used to getting things now. With just a swipe of the finger, our smart phones give us what we want almost instantaneously: plane tickets purchased, a book ordered, two-day shipping, to your door, no installation required. Would you wait 15 minutes for a 2nd marshmallow?

In our sermon today, we will explore the concept of Christian patience. Whether we are talking about a 12 year old chronic illness, or a 12 year old girl who dies—it appears outwardly that God's kingdom is late in arriving. Yet in both cases, Jesus does come and he comes with great might and mercy. Today we consider the perfect timing of Jesus, our King. Although He might delay, but He certainly does come.

Twelve years is a long time to wait for a cure. It was an even longer time to live as an outcast. This woman's bleeding made her ceremonially unclean, which meant she could not have contact with any other Israelite or with Temple worship for all that time. Anyone who touches her would also be declared unclean. So she waited. For twelve years, she sought a cure; he exhausted her savings on this doctor and that treatment. Having spent all she had, she was no better off. In fact, she had only gotten worse. For twelve years she waited, until she learned of Him.

They say He has healed many diseases. They say He has power to cast out demons. It is even said that He made a paralytic to walk with just a word. He preaches and teaches with the authority of a prophet. He speaks good news and talks of God's kingdom as a gracious visitation; a saving of the lowly and sinful. He could be the one for whom we've been waiting. He could be the Christ of Israel.

The faith of this woman endures as she searches and reaches out to find Him. But the crowd is so large. How will she get His attention? She notices He is walking with the ruler of the synagogue. What will he say if Jesus is found with a woman who is unclean? So she decides to come in secretly. Perhaps if she can just touch Him, or even His robe, His power will make her well. Her faith endures as she searches and reaches out to touch the hem of His garment. And behold, immediately she is made well.

It took twelve years, but she found Him. Or He found her. In fact, He found her the minute His kingdom drew her heart to trust in Him. This is the nature of God's kingdom. Its rule is not to give us whatever we want, whenever we want it. Its rule is not in terms of doctors or medicine or cures or earthly outcomes. Its rule is something that happens in your heart. Its fruits are patience, endurance, searching, reaching, trusting.

And so it is for you. The same test is before you. Maybe you suffer from a chronic affliction like back pain or arthritis, or a debilitating disease like diabetes or dementia. Maybe you've spent a lot of money on treatments, you've seen doctor after doctor, but have not been able to find a consistent diagnosis or cure. Perhaps it's a spiritual affliction like impatience with people or anger in relationships. Maybe it's some other sort of desire for gratification: a gratification by gossiping or by searching for sensual pleasure in those things which are unclean and unholy.

It is laid before you too: to gratify, to satisfy, to pacify. The test is before you: to take the marshmallow and gratify your flesh today or to wait for the Savior who will satisfy your whole self eternally. You could take the marshmallow. You could gratify your flesh for a time. You could respond by angrily arguing, by constantly complaining, by doubtfully despairing. And that is what we do. We want to reach out for the touch screen solution, a swipe of the finger which will make it all go away, a connection that will get us what we want now. These sins of impatience and instant gratification are chronic disabilities that will always infect our flesh.

But there are times when God wants us to wait. There are those many, many times, when God delays. Sometimes He delays twelve years. But His kingdom does not come in instant gratifications, but eternal satisfactions. Even though physically, temporally, Jesus might seem to delay coming or answering your prayers, we know that He has come to us already. He has taught us to endure, to search, and to reach out for Him.

And there He is, nailed to a cross, enduring our pains, being separated and outcast for our sins, being afflicted by our curse. There He wants us to find Him, in His everlasting patience, on the cross. The cross is where our faith is reaching. On the cross we will find the answer which does not gratify, but which satisfies. There God's anger against our sins is satisfied and our salvation is satisfied. There we find what we are looking for.

As the writer to the Hebrews says: *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.* (Hebrews 12:1-3)

So we keep on praying, enduring, searching, waiting. And in the midst of a crowd, He stops. He wants the crowd to notice her. He wants them to hear what He has to say. He turns to her and says, "Go in peace."

This is a promise of more than two marshmallows. It is a promise that cannot be broken; a promise of His return. And that is what Christian patience is all about. It is about His delay. It is confidence that, as the psalmist says, *"weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning"* (Psalm 30:5). And when that morning sun rises, God will bring all joy to fulfillment. So eternally full, that no treat, no fleshly gratification, could ever compare. *"For the Lord is good to those who wait for Him; to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."* (Lamentations 3:25-26) Even when He delays, even when you lose someone you love, even when death itself visits you, you know that He will come, and when He does He will raise up the bodies of all, and give to all who believe eternal life in Him. For *"Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many, to those who eagerly wait, for him he will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation"* (Hebrews 9:28).

Although He might delay, we know He will come; and in His word of promise, we know He already has come. Amen.