

**June 27, 2021**  
**Fifth after Pentecost**

**Meditation:** “L’chaim”

I remember, many moons ago when I was in seminary, studying this very piece of scripture - the story of a girl who is on death’s door, dies, and is raised, and right in the middle of the story is another story about a hemorrhaging woman. I remember the professor telling us that this story within a story was unquestionably the work of some editor, who dropped one story into the middle of another one. The question that was asked was, why? Why would someone insert one story into the middle of another story?

I also remember this story because of another course I took at seminary. It was titled Ministry Among the Abused. We were given texts to prepare a 5 minute sermon from. I was given the story within the story - the story of the hemorrhaging woman. I remember the research I did in preparing that sermon. Blood makes someone ritually unclean. If you are ritually unclean, you cannot go to the temple, with the rest of the community, to worship God. During a woman’s cycle she is unclean, and so is anyone who comes into contact with her. This goes right down to sitting where she had just been seated. It was not unknown that women would have a separate tent or dwelling they would move into during their period, to protect others from coming into unwitting contact with them. And knowingly contacting someone else when you knew you were unclean could be cause for death by stoning. All of this is to say that the woman who had been hemorrhaging blood for a dozen years had been socially isolated for a dozen years. This woman would have had to use the local well at a different time of day than the rest of the women in the village. She would have had to stay in her own quarters, without the ability to go to the market or anywhere, for a dozen years. We’ve just been through about a year and a half of trying to keep isolated, can you imagine a dozen years of complete isolation, without being able to connect on skype or zoom or facetime or even on the phone? I think I would prefer actual physical death over a dozen years of social death.

And then there is the story of the daughter of the leader of the synagogue. She is on her deathbed when Jairus approaches Jesus begging for help. And on the way to her, a messenger delivers the news that she has died. There is no longer a need for a healer.

Here we have two stories. One about actual physical death, and the other about a social death. And I can’t help but think of the news over the past few weeks of the death of all the children at residential schools. Of over 100,000 students, some estimates say that 4-6,000 children died. Other estimates say it is over 10,000. Many died from tuberculosis, exacerbated by malnutrition. Whatever the cause, whether their deaths were recorded or not, whether they were buried in mass graves or unmarked graves this is a huge and tragic part of our history. On the one hand, we have the death of the children. There is

also the attempt to kill their language and their culture. And, there is the ongoing spiritual death of the Indigenous peoples over what can only be called genocide or attempted genocide. The spiritual scars are still raw, and every finding – Kamloops, Cowessess, and there will be more – bring the pain right back to the surface, like the event just happened, all over again.

When God created life, God looked at all that God had made and said that it was very good. And along the way we have sinned and done evil and have pitted ourselves against God, against whatever competes with us for food, whether it be weed or insect or animal. We have even pitted ourselves against .... ourselves, against those who look different or talk different or think differently or worship differently. Into this world, Jesus came, to reconcile, to restore life to God's original hope.

In the scripture both Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman realized their need of Jesus; realized that only Jesus would be able to help them. Jairus thought he was asking for an intervention that would prevent a death, and what was eventually needed was an intervention to restore life. The woman knew that she too needed an intervention to restore life. Not just an end to her bleeding, but a restoration to social life.

The children who have died are dead and gone. They will never grow up or have families of their own. We will never know what contributions they could have made to society. But, the spiritual pain, the spiritual death, that continues to this day amongst the survivors – that needs to be healed, life needs to be restored – the life of their language, the life of their culture, the life of their spirituality. And in order for that to happen, we need Jesus. We need his strength and courage and humility. We need it so we can listen without being defensive and feeling a need to respond or to justify. We need it so we can listen and ask what is needed of us instead of trying to fix or prescribe next steps.

This coming week we will mark the 154<sup>th</sup> birthday of Canada as a nation. Instead of celebrating what has been built at the expense of many, may we take the time this year to grieve the tragic events in our history, may we take the time to listen without defending or trying to fix, may we take the time to educate ourselves and commit to reconciliation and to a new life for all who live on this land: whether they be white or black, red or yellow; whether they worship Creator, Allah, God, Yahweh, or other. This is our life's work if we truly believe in the life and work and sacrifice of Jesus – to reconcile and to restore to life. May it be so. Oh, and L'chaim – to life. Amen.