



Rev. Chris Taylor - 10.27.19

"Five Smooth Stones Sermon Series: Faith"

Isaiah 53:1-6 and Matthew 9:18-26

This past week one of my colleagues shared Tyler Moon's story with me. You may have heard about him. He is twenty five and lives in Eden Prairie, Minnesota . He does logistics for General Mills. Tyler has always enjoyed running and this year decided to run the ten mile portion of the Medtronic Twin Cities Marathon.

"I was feeling great that day," he said. "I was pretty excited to get up and do it. I'd been looking forward to it for a really long time." So a few weeks ago, at 7 a.m. on October 6, he lined up with other runners in the Twin Cities and took off. Instead of his name, he had "Jesus Saves" printed on the front of his runner's bib. He wanted to make a statement to the people who saw him. He wanted to offer a witness to his own faith in Jesus Christ.

He was keeping a pretty good pace; running eight minute miles which was his target going in, but at the eighth mile something went wrong. For about ten seconds his heart stopped pumping blood. He had a heart attack and fell on his left side, fracturing some bones in his face and causing a concussion.

The guy running behind would later say "He just collapsed. He basically fell straight down." The amazing thing here is that that guy behind him just happened to be a registered nurse who had extensive experience with CPR. Seeing Tyler collapse go down, he dropped to his side and realized Tyler wasn't breathing. As he checked Tyler's pulse he yelled out for someone to call 911, and then he and another person began to administer CPR. They saved Tyler's life. The reason all this made the national news was that while people knew him as Jesse, this registered nurse's given name was "Jesus."

It's a great story: a twenty five year old guy wearing a "Jesus Saves" bib has a heart attack, and right behind him is a person who knows exactly what to do – a person whose name just happens to translate as "Jesus." Most would probably call it a wonderful coincidence, and maybe it was. But I suspect that someday when you and I are standing in the presence of God and looking back over the course of

our lives, we are going to discover that so many of those coincidences actually bear God's fingerprints – that God was at work right in the midst of them.

Tyler Moon's experience and that "Jesus Saves" bib of his lead us into our text: the story of a woman touching Jesus' robe and being healed; and a synagogue leader reaching out, believing that Jesus alone could bring his daughter back to life.

Part of the power of this text is the significant risk involved for these two. The two events didn't happen in private. Jesus was in the midst of a crowd there in Capernaum, and as part of that crowd that both the leader and the woman approached him.

Capernaum was not a large town. Everyone would have known each other, and while there was growing support for Jesus amid the general population, it is clear that there was also growing tension between him and the religious leadership. Here in the ninth chapter alone we find some scribes accusing him of blaspheming – a crime punishable by death – and some Pharisees criticizing him for eating with a bunch of sinners; an act that would have made him ritually impure.

So when this leader approached Jesus in the midst of that crowd and asked him to raise his daughter from the dead he was risking a great deal. He was risking his reputation; risking his place in the community; risking his very livelihood by turning to Jesus in this way.

The same holds true of the woman. She had been bleeding for twelve years, a fact that would have required her to avoid contact with others because she was considered unclean. There would have been no hiding that in a community as small as Capernaum. So what in the world was she doing touching Jesus' garment?! There is a reason why she snuck up from behind him. She didn't want Jesus or anyone else to realize what she was doing. But she risked it. She risked mockery and condemnation just to touch the hem of his garment, believing that if she did she would be healed.

What both that leader and this woman show is great faith, and what they show us is that faith is not the same as knowledge. That leader didn't know that Jesus could restore his daughter. He hadn't raised anyone else from the dead up to this point. Jesus certainly hadn't said anything about possessing that capacity. The

same with this woman: she didn't know that just touching the tassel of his garment could heal her. No one else had done it. There was no precedent that she could point to and say, "See, he can do it!"

But each of them chose to believe. And that's faith – not knowledge, not certainty in any scientifically verifiable sense, but a choice to believe. And even more, real faith involves acting on that choice. They chose to believe in Jesus, and then they risked everything – they risked ridicule and abuse – by putting that faith into action.

That is saving faith. That is the kind of faith that changes lives. "Take heart, daughter," Jesus says to the woman, "your faith has made you well."

We worship a God for whom nothing is impossible. Nothing! Look at what Jesus does: He heals this woman of a devastating illness; he restores the daughter of this man who thought he had lost her. There is nothing, then, nothing in all the world that can separate us from God's love; nothing that we are going to face that we can't handle with God by our side.

How do we open our lives to this God? Scripture is clear: it is by our faith! Wherever there is faith, Christ is present. "Your faith has made you well!" When we talk about five essential practices, five smooth stones to carry with us on this great journey, then, we've got to put faith right there at the top. And what that woman and that leader show us is that this kind of faith is so much more than just saying the right words.

Think about what they risked! It was an enormous step it was for those two to approach Jesus as they did. What they did was so much more than giving a nod in God's direction ("Yes, we know you are there, Lord"). No, the kind of faith we see in them – saving faith – clearly has an impact on our choices. It shapes the kind of lives we live. There is risk in that kind of faith. There is sacrifice. There is the challenge to go places and do things we'd just as soon avoid.

Some of you may remember "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade". Harrison Ford and Sean Connery! Towards the end of the movie Indy is standing on the edge of a great chasm. The chalice that can save his father's life is on the other side. But how to get across? There is no visible way to do it. But then he remembers a key phrase from his research: "it takes a leap of faith". Choosing to

believe that there is a way across even though he can't see it, Indy takes a step out into the abyss, and it is only then that the bridge is finally revealed.

Real faith, saving faith, can feel like that sometimes – like stepping out into an empty void not knowing how it is all going to play out. But it is in precisely that kind of faith that Christ is present; precisely there that God's presence and power begins to flow in us and through us accomplishing so much more than we ever could have hoped. Like that bridge, it is only when we take the step of faith that the reality of an invisible God becomes apparent to our senses.

Where are you being called to take that step of faith – called to put your faith in to practice? Maybe it is in forgiving someone who truly hurt you. Maybe it is in what you give, or where you invest some of your time and energy. Maybe it is something going on at work or in your home... Wherever Christ is calling you, I want to encourage you this morning to make that choice to follow.

It can be hard. It can feel risky. But it is right there in our surrender to God that light and life, and all that is true and good and beautiful begins to flood our lives.