

Proper 8B 2015 sermon

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." 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.

I just finished listening to a 24-lecture course on Einstein's Theories of Relativity.* I listened to the whole course twice, and yet to say that I understand all – or even most – of the teachings would be a bald-faced lie. But there are some *conclusions* arising from the Physics of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics

that I accept as true, even though I don't completely understand why. One of these relates to whether light is a particle or a wave, and the conclusion scientists draw is this: It depends on what you're looking for. If you're *looking* for a particle, you'll **find** a particle, not a wave; if you're looking for a wave, you'll find a wave, not a particle. What determines which characteristic light manifests depends on what we try to measure, what we try to describe and identify. The minute we try to identify a particle of light – a photon of light – its wave characteristics collapse; and the minute we try to identify a light wave, its particle properties collapse. By simply trying to *identify* a light particle, a photon, looking at it and finding roughly where it is, saying, “Aha! You are here, not there!” – by the simple act of observing it, characterizing it, naming its location, we can no longer see its wave properties.

I think something similar is true with human beings. The minute we start labeling someone, categorizing someone, naming someone, we immediately blind ourselves to other possibilities, characteristics and potentials in that person. And we do it all the time to one another, and to ourselves.

Names matter. Labels matter. How we choose to see people matters. As happens when we study light, what we look for is what we find.

David Lose recalls that in the early Harry Potter books, the young Harry was called, “the boy who lived,” since Harry was supposed to have been killed by a curse from the dark wizard Voldemort; and yet he lived. So his nickname was “the boy who lived”.

In the book of Genesis, God says to Abram, “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” (Genesis 17:5) If Abram had previously been thought – either by others or by himself – to have been an insignificant shepherd, this change of name means that he will no longer be identified as insignificant. And his wife Sarai is now to be called Sarah, which means “princess” – a special and honored title for a woman chosen by God. We see similar name changes throughout the Bible, always with a corresponding change in how that person is henceforth to be seen and identified. Jacob “the supplanter” becomes Israel, “the Man who Wrestled with God.” Simon becomes Peter, “the Rock” on which Jesus will build his church. The staunch Pharisee and Jewish purist Saul becomes Paul, a Gentile name to reflect his conversion to becoming the great Christian missionary to the Gentiles.

“Names,” writes Professor Lose, “-- especially nicknames that are given by others to describe something about us – can be pretty hard to shake. Whether they are accurate or not, whether we like them or not, whether they are flattering or not, the descriptors hung on us have significant power. Why? Because in naming **one** reality about us – whether true or not – they tend to reduce all of who we are to

that one dimension.” Just as naming **one** of the realities of light collapses its other characteristic.

Which brings us to today’s Gospel passage.

While a crowd gathers around Jesus, a leader of the local synagogue, Jairus, approaches Jesus and begs him to come to his house and heal his daughter, who is “at the point of death”. Jesus sets off toward Jairus’ house, but on the way, he is interrupted, and in the process, someone’s name is changed and future is restored.

Dr. Lose explains: “Among the crowd, you see, is a woman. She is given no name. She is described only as a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. Assuming this was most likely vaginal bleeding, that condition would have rendered her both [ritually] impure and unable to bear children [both of which would open her to scorn in her culture and religion]. Which perhaps explains why she is there all alone, hoping just to touch the edge of Jesus’ garment, desperate for even the possibility of healing. She has no advocate, no family, no community to beseech Jesus on her behalf. She is nothing, just ‘the woman who had bled for twelve years.’

“Yet after Jesus discerns what had happened – that power had gone out of him [when she touched his robe] – and after she stepped forward in fear and trembling to admit her deed and her hope, Jesus gives her a new name, calling her ‘daughter’, calling her a person of great faith, and naming her healed.

“I don’t know if something similar happened with either Jairus or [his young daughter; whether he became] ‘the leader desperate enough to run to the rabbi’ or she ‘the girl who died and then was made alive.’ But I do know that names are hard to shake. (Notice, for instance, that when Jesus names the girl as one who sleeps rather than is dead the people laugh.) Names – whether nicknames or some other descriptor – are convenient because they work to summarize a lot of things into one element. But they are also dangerous because they reduce us, strip us of our individuality and uniqueness, and label us according to what someone else sees.”

And if you are *looking* for a particle, you will **find** a particle.

“With the tragedy of Charleston so recent in our memory, it’s difficult not to think of the way we name and label those who differ from us, whether in skin color or ethnicity or belief [or sexual orientation], the names we have hung on – and hurled at – others to reduce and objectify them. Humans are, by nature, social, even tribal, creatures, and so we gather with those who seem *like* us and characterize those who **don’t** as different, naming *them* by some attribute that creates convenient definitions and borders for us by stripping others of their individuality and labeling and lumping them together.

“And yet the pattern of Christ is exactly the opposite. Jesus is constantly crossing borders – whether geographic or social – to see people for who they are and to draw them into relationship. That’s why the woman who interrupts Jesus’ preaching and healing tour is no longer just ‘woman’ or ‘the one who has been bleeding for twelve years.’ She is now ‘daughter,’ one restored to family and community and health and life.

“This is, of course, Christ’s charge to us as well. To see people for who they really are, unique persons, each created in the image of God, and each worthy of our attention, care, love, and respect. Christ calls us to leave the comfortable and familiar behind in order to reach out to others as brothers and sisters, all children of God.

“Yet let’s be honest: simply *saying* that isn’t enough. We **know** this. We know that what happened in Charleston is horrendously wrong and we probably didn’t need the thousand or so statements that flooded the press in the aftermath to tell us that. And we know that the discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or religion or economic status [or sexual orientation] that happens on the streets of cities and towns across the country every single day is also terribly and tragically wrong. We know this, and being told once more will probably make little difference.

“What *might* make a difference, however, is being known and named ourselves. What might *help* is recognizing that we, too, often are labeled, reduced to one attribute or incident that hardly captures our identity and yet has named and shaped our behavior and our future in ways that are unhealthy and unhelpful.”

I would invite you this week to call to mind those names **you** have been given – perhaps given by *yourself* – names that seem to chase you through the day and haunt you at night. To name those illnesses or failures or missteps or regrets that somehow have come to define you. And then to hear that Christ sees you differently. Christ *names* you differently. You are “daughter” or “son” and “person of great faith” and “wonderful” and “beloved of God” and more.

“In Christ, you see, we are given a new name. In fact, in Baptism we are named as ‘children of God’ and we are promised that no matter what happens, no matter where we may go in life, no matter what we may do or have done to us, God always sees a unique and beloved individual worthy of love, honor, and respect. And each week when we come to church we come to be **reminded** of this new name, to be reminded of our identity given and held in absolute and unconditional love. We come to be reminded because so much in the week has worked to make us *forget* and to undermine our confidence. So we come to church to be named anew.

“And when we have remembered our new name and received again our new identity, perhaps then we can go out and resist the urge to use *destructive* names to define and label and reduce others. Perhaps then **we** can reach out in love to

call those around us – and especially those whom society has overlooked – brothers and sisters, daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, all children of God.

“The boy who lived, the woman who bled, the man who failed, the girl who dropped out of high school, the kid who got hooked on drugs, the family with no home. These are **not** the names God has in store for us. This week, it’s our privilege to name people anew – beloved child of God – and to set people free to walk into a future of hope and promise.”

AMEN

* The Great Courses, *Einstein's Relativity and the Quantum Revolution: Modern Physics for Non-Scientists*, 2nd Edition, [Professor Richard Wolfson Ph.D.](#)
Middlebury College

All quotations are from David Lose’s Blog, “...in the Meantime,” *Pentecost 5 B: Known and Named* Posted by DJL on Jun 22, 2015 in Dear Partner in Preaching, http://www.davidlose.net/2015/06/pentecost-5-b-known-and-named/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+davidlose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29