

I want to start out with a question this morning: Have you ever been with a group of people and at first it seemed like you had absolutely nothing in common? And then after spending time with them you realized you actually have a great deal in common? You learn that even with your different life experiences, family background, culture, what you want for your life and family is what they want for their life and family. What you struggle with they struggle with. Your insecurities are their insecurities. Your sense of a full life is their sense of a full life.

I experienced this truth in high definition last October when I was in a small room with about two dozen new believers in a village outside of Calcutta. As I sat there, I asked myself, What could I possibly have in common with these people?

Our team was there that day to hear their stories and offer them words of encouragement and prayer. First, a woman stood up and shared that before Jesus came into her life, she was possessed and tormented by multiple demons. Then a man stood up and told us that before Jesus came into his life he was a terrorist. He said before Christ came into his life he had killed many people. Then another man stood up and said that before Jesus came into his life he was the local witch doctor. For years he had practiced his sorcery in real ways and people were amazed at his power. Then he shared that his young daughter got sick and his sorcery was powerless to cure her and that the Hindu gods couldn't heal his daughter either. Then he shared that he prayed for Jesus to heal his daughter and his daughter was healed. Now this former witch doctor leads a house church in his village.

As I thought about it, I realized that in areas of life that really matter, I have much in common with a former demoniac, former terrorist, and a former witch doctor. Whether we live in a village in India or in a condo in the Silicon Valley, we are people with the same human needs. We will all grow old and die and we want our kids to be okay. We all need hope. We all sin and hunger for a sense of forgiveness and atonement. We all see suffering and sorrow around us we crave justice and comfort for the afflicted. We all crave some form of community, acceptance and connection. And we all have dark forces in us such as hatred, lust, and selfishness, and we want to believe that a touch from Jesus will heal us.

We struggle against forces we cannot control. It's the human condition. Whether we are executives, investors, entrepreneurs, teachers, empty nesters, stay-at-home moms or pastors, we

struggle. As Henry David Thoreau said, "The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation."

Whether we are in India or here on the Peninsula, Jesus offers the same marvelous open-door invitation to those who are desperate: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven*" (Matt. 5:3). I see over and over again that Jesus gladly extends his hand when desperate and broken people come to him with the faith that he can heal and make things right. In Matthew chapters 8-9 we see nine miracles. These verses show examples of people who cry out to Jesus in faith and with a hope that he can help them. And throughout these chapters we see Jesus responding with love and compassion when desperate people call out to him. Our big idea this morning is this: No matter who we are Jesus embraces our brokenness in whatever form and meets our needs through heartfelt expressions of faith.

The opportunity to call out to God with our needs through heartfelt expressions of faith is a gift from God. The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews, in chapter 11 verse 6, says that without heartfelt expressions of faith it is impossible to please God. Our heartfelt expressions of faith in Jesus draw us closer to him and to the power of God. And so we can say confidently that faith changes everything. I hope you will be encouraged this morning by this quote from John Stott. It reminds me of the fact that faith itself and even the ability to express faith is a gift from God given to desperate people to connect with God. "Faith is the hand Jesus gives us to grasp the new things present in Jesus." —John Stott

This morning we are going to look at three heartfelt expressions of faith. We pick up our story in Matthew chapter 9 starting in verse 18 with a heartfelt cry that many of us here can identify with:

Jesus, help me! I'm desperate!

While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. (Matthew 9:18-19)

Saying what? Jesus had just finished a conversation with some critical religious leaders. He told them that he had come to save those who acknowledge their need and confess their sins; that he came for those who knew they were spiritually sick and needed a Savior. So a church leader—a respected man in the community, a family man who hung out socially and worshipped with the Pharisees, who no one would think had anything in common

with a born-again terrorist or a witch doctor—came into the house and knelt down at the feet of Jesus. There are a few words Matthew could have used to indicate kneeling, but Matthew used the Greek word for worship. The synagogue leader, who we know from Luke and Mark's account was named Jairus, came to Jesus like the magi, like the leper, like the seraphim and cherubim in Revelation. He fell at Jesus' feet in the home of the former tax collector Matthew.

What made Jairus appeal to a man his social network mocked? One thing—desperation. His daughter had been very sick and he got word that she had just died. What parent wouldn't identify with the desperation of Jairus? He must have taken her to the best doctors available and spared no expense. We see Jairus broken and desperate but within his plea, we see something else. We see faith that Jesus could do what no one else could do—we see hope. There is confidence that because Jesus has the authority and power to heal others and forgive sins, he can bring his daughter back to life if he wanted to. Jairus is a great example to us that if we have a need that no one else is able to meet, turn to Jesus. And above all else if you are here today and feel the burden of your sin, seek forgiveness from Jesus and find relief.

Jesus got up from the table where he had been sitting with sinners and tax collectors to go with Jairus to show that not only did he have the authority to forgive sins, he also has the power to raise the dead, to breathe life into dead bones and bodies. So Jesus and his disciples are walking to Jairus' house and something happens along the way.

Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." (verses 20-21)

On the surface Jairus and this woman were as different as India and the Peninsula. This woman was the ultimate outsider. Her chronic illness likely made having children impossible. She had no one to love her and care for her in her old age. If she had ever even had a husband he would have likely left her. Her Jewish culture told her that her bleeding made her "unclean," not for seven days but for the past twelve years. How ironic. She was not welcome to worship at the synagogue that Jairus oversaw. She said what she said, only to herself because it wasn't safe to share her deepest thoughts with anyone. Imagine the pain of not receiving a hug or touch from anyone for twelve years. Imagine not being allowed to share a home or share a meal with someone for twelve years. She was unclean, she was isolated and she was incurable, slowly bleeding to death.

She couldn't even speak out to Jesus her heartfelt cry of faith, so she said to herself, "I'll sneak up and secretly touch his prayer cloak. Even if I just touch a tassel on his cloak, I will be healed." We see in this woman an expression of faith in Jesus that he can do what no doctor could do. We see hope. Jairus and this woman are so different but in reality they both expressed a desperate

faith. And they both had hope. Let's look at Jesus' response to the woman.

Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment. (v. 22)

He encouraged her with tender words letting her know it was right for her to touch him. I love that the word Jesus used for healing here carries a deeper meaning that her sins were forgiven. With heartfelt desperate expression of faith she had gone from unclean to clean, from isolation to community, from death to life. The same is what happens when we express our faith in Jesus as our personal Savior.

By touching Jesus' clothes the woman didn't express a perfect faith by any means. In fact it feels to us like it was kind of superstitious. She thought that there was some supernatural power in his clothes. Note to us this morning: Jesus isn't expecting our desperate cries out in faith to be perfectly theologically aligned. And he doesn't expect us to have all our commandments aligned either. He just wants us to come to him, to push through the crowd and come to him. The more empty-handed the better.

And he expects our cry of faith to not be a faith in the **idea** of faith. He expects our faith to be in a **person**. He expects us to be hopeful that Jesus has the power to forgive the sins of anyone, including your sins and mine, and then to live in the hope that Jesus will meet our needs as he sees fit.

Our story continues... Imagine how hopeful Jairus must be feeling after seeing what Jesus did for this woman. I imagine Jairus is race-walking Jesus to his home!

When Jesus entered the synagogue leader's house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. News of this spread through all that region. (verses 23-26)

What was going on here? A young girl was dead, a family was grieving, and her body was probably still on her bed with her favorite little girl stuff beside her and people making noise playing pipes or flutes. It was common in that culture that when grieving the death of a loved one, professional flute players were hired to play sad, dissonant tunes to go along with the grieving. So picture loud wailing and weeping, chest beating, clothes being torn away, the tearing out of hair; it was chaos. Now Jesus enters. The people were not wrong here; this girl was dead. Jesus wasn't denying death; he was redefining death. Her death is not the end. It's not the grim reality it seems. But they laughed at him. First an unclean woman touched him and now Jesus touches an unclean corpse. But only the powerful touch of Christ could awaken the dead.

And the news spread. It spread from Capernaum, to Jerusalem, to Damascus, to Rome, to Africa, to Asia, to villages in Northern India, to cities on our Peninsula. And it's still spreading and giving hope to all who put their faith in Christ and his resurrection power.

Our story continues with another heartfelt expression of faith. It comes from two blind men who no doubt heard about what Jesus had been doing all around the lake. They heard Jesus' words, they heard about how he was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies, and they heard about his miracles—not that he healed sprained ankles and runny noses, but he healed lepers and lame people. The sick were healed, and a little girl was raised from the dead. And most importantly he had the authority and the power to forgive sins, and they probably loved the fact that he stuck it to the religious leaders.

I think these guys figured out something that others hadn't totally figured out yet. They were blind, but they were not stupid. They had spiritual eyes that could see Jesus for who he was. They were the first to identify him in the Gospel as "Son of David" which is a title for Messiah. These two blind men were the first to see that the object of their faith was Jesus the Messiah. These two blind men were the first to connect that Jesus was in the royal line, a descendant of King David and also the fulfillment of the covenant promises to his ancestor King David. And the cry of these blind men is the same desperate cry many of us should make this morning.

Jesus, have mercy on me so I can see you clearly!

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. (verses 27-29)

Jesus leaves Jairus' house and I'm picturing these two blind guys trying to follow, calling out over and over, Son of David, have mercy on us.... Jesus doesn't stop walking but keeps going. Why is he doing this? Is he testing their faith? In scripture, blindness is often associated as a punishment for one's own sin. Not always but Jesus healed a man who was blind from birth in John chapter 9. This plea of mercy could be more than an ask for a cure to their physical blindness, but it would fit that they would want to go to the Messiah and confess their sin and repent of their sin that they think caused their blindness. What we do know for sure is that these blind men wanted to be healed.

We see again our Lord and Savior loves and embraces us in our brokenness in whatever form and meets our needs through heartfelt expressions of faith.

Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you"; and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region. (verses 29-31)

This is exactly what we would do. We grab hold of the hand of faith and God touches hearts, but then we immediately let go of the hand of faith and stop trusting his word and go back once again and walk by sight instead of faith.

I have come to realize this week that I do this all the time. We have a challenge here at CPC that isn't unusual. We have "space

issues." God is giving us wonderful opportunities to mobilize and I feel like we have just scratched the surface on how we can all together bless our surrounding community. And when I look through spiritual eyes, it all makes sense. We have the message, a strong core of believers, the opportunity, and the unity to take new territory for Christ and the staff team to support. And God sternly reminds me of this. Then I seem to walk out of his presence and my spiritual eyes go dark and my physical eyes see parking issues, classroom size issues, auditorium seating issues, and before I know it I'm stumbling as I walk by sight instead of walking by faith.

Maybe you are here today and through your physical eyes you see great. But maybe God is revealing something else for us to see. Maybe he is shedding light that we have become blind to what really matters. We have been probing in the dark and we are running into things. Sure, we see with clarity what is trivial, temporal, the carnal. But we don't have spiritual eyes to see what is truly important, eternal, what is spiritual. This passage helps us to ask God to see clearly.

We can ask God the right questions: "God, have mercy on me! Help me to see how to live for what is significant." Or, "God, have mercy on me! Help me to see what on earth I am here for."

Maybe you're not feeling as desperate as Jairus or that poor woman who was bleeding. But you know that your lack of faith has caused you to bump into things like a blind person without a cane. God help us all to not walk blindly into walls at our jobs or in our most important relationships. Walking blindly hurts us and others. Walking blindly leaves cuts and bruises. Walking blindly always leaves a wake.

Knowing who I put my faith in makes all the difference. Let's all remember when we get into our cars or get on our trains tomorrow and go to our places of work to put our trust in the Son of David to meet our needs. To put our trust in the promised Messiah, the Sovereign over the universe, who is all powerful, all knowing, all present, and who loves me so intimately that he has every hair on my head numbered. Out of his goodness he gives us the faith to save us and he gives us the faith to send us out to serve him wherever he asks us to walk by faith. That leads to our last heartfelt expression of faith in this passage today, and it's a subtle one.

Jesus, use me so others see my faith and trust you to meet their needs.

While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. (verses 32-33a)

We have seen this before, but here is what I want us to especially notice. The demon-possessed mute man was not showing faith. The demon didn't want to stay as far away from Jesus as possible. The real story here is that there were people around this

possessed man who had faith. They acted on their faith and they made a plan to bring this man to Jesus and they carried it out. They believed that Jesus was the only one who had the power and authority to exorcise the demon.

What have we seen so far? The eyes of the blind are opened. The lame are healed. The mute will speak. Matthew is making it crystal clear to us that this Jesus is the promised Messiah. Matthew's favorite Old Testament prophet to quote is Isaiah. Most everyone who had spiritual eyes to see around that lake would understand that Isaiah 35:5-6 describes the coming Messiah and we should have eyes to see him. Compare this verse with what we have just read. ***"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy."***

The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons." (verses 33b-34)

But the Pharisees are blind and don't marvel. Not only do they not marvel, they speak against Jesus. We saw earlier in chapter 8 that they accused him of blasphemy. They criticized him for eating and drinking with sinners. Then when he went to heal Jairus' daughter they laughed at him, and now they do the worst thing of all. They were helpless to deny the miracle they all saw, so they attribute it to Satan's power. They showed that they were closer to Satan than they were to Jesus. No wonder Jesus pronounces judgment on them. In Matthew 23 Jesus says,

- Woe to you... Blind guides! (v. 16)
- Woe to you... Blind fools! (v. 17)
- Woe to you... Blind men! (v. 19)
- Woe to you... Blind Pharisee! (v. 26)

Some of us walked in here today feeling afflicted. There is great weight on you, great pressure. Maybe it's health-related, maybe it's relationship-related, maybe work has got you to the point where you feel desperate. Be encouraged that calling out to Jesus with a desperate faith pleases God. And no matter how clumsy you feel when you grab that hand of faith, grab it with desperation. Grab it with hope that you will experience the goodness of God as he sees fit.

For others of us here, we haven't felt desperate in a long time. Life is relatively smooth, you are thankful to live a fairly peaceful and comfortable life. You have friends, enough money, maybe a family who loves you, you feel pretty connected with God, with

others in your church, and you give to others as you are able. And this morning you feel comfortable. The family's fine, the market is good, and the Warriors will likely win it all again this year!

I remember reading one time that the job of a pastor is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the too comfortable. Full disclosure—I tell you as you receive this message today I find myself comfortable right along with you. But as I wrestle with this passage and look at next week's text I am certain that God wants me to trust him more even if it means becoming less comfortable. God's goal for me isn't to become more comfortable. God's goal for me is to walk closer with him and be more like him.

Walking by faith says, "I'm living for greater eternal purposes." Walking by faith says, "I'm going to trust God even though I can't see where this will lead." Walking by faith says, "I refuse to settle for a lesser adventure." Walking by faith says, "I'm going to trust God to meet my needs." Walking by faith says, "I refuse to keep Jesus at a distance, and I want all of him."

There is a prayer for those of us who are too comfortable. It's an inspiring prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake, the British Naval Captain in the 16th Century. I don't endorse how Drake lived his life according to history, but I do endorse this prayer that has been attributed to him for almost 450 years that has been prayed and has been afflicting too-comfortable Christians to walk by faith. My prayer would be that you take a close look at Drake's words and allow God to work these things in your life, venturing away from the shores of your comfort zone and basking in the joy of his navigation!

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love. Amen!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No.1434-18FC