

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

God's Timing

Psalm 30
Mark 5: 21-43

Rev. Dr. Galen E. Russell III
June 28, 2009

But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."

Prayer: Holy God, please send your spirit into this place once again so that we may we experience and know your grace, your healing, and your power in our lives. Amen.

Today's topic is timing. Timing is one of those ingredients in any given situation that can make it or break it, right? Good timing is essential in good comedy (and I daresay, in good preaching, too); you have to deliver the punch line at just the right time; otherwise, the joke's on you. Good timing in buying and selling stocks, bonds, mutual funds or real estate assets can mean the difference between profits and losses. Good timing in poker, like Kenny Rogers sings, means "you gotta know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, know when to run!"

The timing of certain events, the way they unfold, also is important. We can be going along in our lives, and wham-o! Something happens, and everything shifts. Priorities shift. Focus shifts. We have become inundated with media attention to global concerns such as the elections in Iran, national concerns such as our ailing economy, health insurance, and political concerns such as the appointment and scrutiny of a Supreme Court nominee, and then, all of a sudden, Ed McMahon dies, Farah Fawcett dies, and Michael Jackson dies, and just like that, our focus shifts to what's really important... life and death concerns, people concerns, everyday-life concerns, concerns that crop up, impinge, and press right at that moment.

Jesus experiences the same shift. He comes from across the sea and is met by a great crowd. Within that crowd is a leader of the local synagogue, Jairus, who is beside himself with desperation. His precious daughter, only twelve years old, is at the point of death. And 'precious' is a good word because estimates are that only 60% of children in the first century survived into their teenage years. That's a little better than one out of every two surviving! So, here's Jairus, a religious leader, part of the "upper crust," hoping against hope, falling in front of a traveling folk healer in a last-ditch effort to prevent the worst from happening—his daughter becoming one of the two that don't survive!. And, Jesus' attention shifts to Jairus and his ailing daughter, much to Jairus' relief and growing encouragement. The two of them start to head off, and the disciples and the rest of the huge crowd follow.

Imagine Jairus' dismay when things don't go according to plan. He is understandably in a rush to get Jesus to his home, but the mission is interrupted because Jesus stops and is delayed by

a woman who was hemorrhaging for as long as Jairus' daughter was alive! Jesus' focus shifts again as he responds to this concern that cropped up, impinged, and pressed in on him right at the moment when this unclean woman snuck up behind him, touched his cloak, and healing power flowed out of him. From Jairus' point of view, likely this was very bad timing! And, from there it got worse. Too late! What Jairus' so desperately feared happened. "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?"

No circumstance, situation, problem, or state of affairs is outside of God's purview, but sometimes the way some things unfold in our lives would make us question that statement. Where is God when we are struggling so? Why doesn't God act when our concerns weigh in heavy on us? When they sap the life out of us? All of Jairus' friends believed the end had come for his daughter, maybe including Jairus himself. From that limited perspective, we would say that the interruption the hemorrhaging woman caused had devastating consequences.

But, friends, there is no such thing as 'bad timing' when we consider what God is doing in our lives. Our circumstances are what they are, but don't ever assume that God has made a mistake in letting us experience what is happening to us right now. Instead, assume the opposite—that God is working with you, through you, and in the problems and circumstances you are experiencing right now. Our response in all our situations is to follow Jesus' instruction: "Do not fear. Only believe." I know, that's tough.

His words come from a place of spiritual calm. A place of confidence. A place of deep trust in God and in God's timing. Jesus has faith and knowledge that God is at work, working things out, working through the circumstances and problems that exist. And as a result, the little girl hears the words, "Talitha cum." "Little girl, get up!"

You see? Jesus once again is our role model. We are to follow Jesus example: do not fear, only believe, *and* we are also to listen for his restorative words, "Talitha cum (get up). In the places where we feel knocked down, worn out, or exhausted, do not fear, only believe, then listen for his words to get up. In the places where everything about our perspective says "it's over," or "why go any further," do not fear, only believe, then wait for the opportunity to take Jesus' hand and get up. If you are faced with a chronic problem, an incessant situation, a place where there seems to be little or no light at the end of your tunnel, do not fear, only believe, then when the opportunity comes, get up.

If we experience the death of a loved one, do not fear, only believe, then trust that in God's good timing that your loved one has the opportunity to get up and receive God's gift of grace into new life eternal. Specific illness—do not fear, only believe, and then get up. Financial crisis—do not fear, only believe, and then get up. Relationship concerns—do not fear, only believe, listen for shift in focus and then get up!

In the national and international concerns, I hope and pray that our leaders of government around the world do not fear, only believe, and then they listen for the opportunity to get up and experience God's restorative power, reconciliatory power, which would set our world on a path of mutual peace and justice for all.

One church marquee had the message "When you pray, don't just say, 'God, here are my

problems.’ Make sure you also say, ‘Problems, here is my God!’” (The Minister’s Annual Manual, Logos Productions, Inc., 2008, p. 234). Take the opportunity today to trust that God is working in all our problems and circumstances. Take this moment to trust in God’s timing, no matter how many problems we may have, no matter how chaotic, no matter how hopeless our lives may seem. Do not fear and believe, and then listen. In God’s timing we are sure to hear, “Talitha cum.” Amen. Get up!