

JUST ONCE...

June 30, 2019

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First Presbyterian Church of Marion, Iowa
Text: Luke 8:40-56

SCRIPTURE

Luke 8:40-56

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying. As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." While he was still speaking, someone came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer." When Jesus heard this, he replied, "Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved." When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother. They were all weeping and wailing for her; but he said, "Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and called out, "Child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astounded; but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.

The Word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God!

SERMON

"One hit wonder" is a phrase you sometimes hear on the radio, for those of us who still occasionally listen to the radio. A one hit wonder refers to a singer or band who has one popular song that is a big hit, but then they quickly fade and do not produce anything else that makes it to the top. Probably one of the best examples was "Macarena," back in the '90s by the duo, Los Del Rio. Of course it became a dance craze, still done at weddings today, but Los Del Rio has had just the one hit, at least here in the US anyway. Every decade has its notable one hit wonders. In the '80s, when music videos on MTV were the big thing, there was "Take Me On" by a Norwegian group called A-Ha. It was a great video, but it was their only hit. In the '70s there was the disco hit "Kung Fu Fighting" by Carl Douglas. If you want to go to classic '60s rock and roll there is "Spirit in the Sky" by Norman Greenbaum. And if you want to go back to 1961 you can talk about an R&B group called the Tokens who had only one hit on the top charts, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight."

The term has been used in other areas. They talk about actors who are one hit wonders. There is only one role for which they are remembered. Anthony Perkins who starred in the Alfred Hitchcock thriller "Psycho" is often put in that category. Paul Hogan, who played Crocodile Dundee, is another one. But any list of one hit wonder actors, usually puts Mark Hamill at the top. Of course, we remember him as Luke Skywalker in the Star Wars films. Those same films launched Harrison Ford, who went on to play all sorts of roles in a number of different movies. But Mark Hamill has pretty much been Luke Skywalker for all of his acting career.

Then there are authors who are one hit wonders, penning only one, usually blockbuster best seller. J.D. Salinger with *The Catcher in the Rye*, Margaret Mitchell who wrote *Gone with the Wind*, and Emily Bronte, author of *Wuthering Heights*, all come to mind.

Now, it may not be quite the same as singers or actors or authors, but I would suggest there are characters in the Bible who are a type of one hit wonder. Just as you listen to a song that you once enjoyed, or watch an actor, or reread a novel, and wish there was more, so you come across a great story in the Bible and wish you had more than what is given in text. The wee little man by the name of Zaccheaus is one I would classify this way. Other than the story of him climbing a sycamore tree, there is nothing more in the Bible about him. Blind Bartimaeus, who was healed on the outskirts of Jericho is another. And our scripture lesson for this morning about a man named Jairus would be a third. As we have just heard, Jesus raised from the dead the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus. It is an amazing story, found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. But there is nothing more about him. There do not even appear to be any later Christian legends about him. I mean, you can almost randomly select a name out of one of Paul's epistles and you will discover stories, often written down centuries later, about how this person brought Christianity to some remote regions of the Roman empire. But there is nothing more about Jairus. He is not considered a saint by the Catholic church. No, the story we find in the gospels is it. He is mentioned just this once.

This story follows immediately after the text we focused on in last week's sermon. It is part of a sequence of events that begins with Jesus calming the storm out on a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. They are blown off course and land on the opposite side of the lake in gentile territory, a region called Geresene. There Jesus heals a man who was controlled by evil spirits. It frightens the local people that Jesus has so much power, so they ask him to leave. This is where we pick up the story today.

Jesus returns to his home base, the lakeside town of Capernaum, and as soon as he is back on land a huge crowd gathers around him. But before Jesus can do anything else, Jairus comes to Jesus and falls at his feet. Mark and Luke tell us that his name was Jairus, but all three gospels make a point of saying that he was a leader of the synagogue. By describing Jairus in this way, we know that he was either rich or highly intelligent, but most likely both. In those days in a place like Galilee, the vast majority of people had to work incredibly hard for long hours, just to survive. It was a major challenge each day just to get enough food for yourself and your family. Very few had the leisure of studying the scriptures enough to achieve a leadership role in the local synagogue. Those who were wealthy and did not have to work 12 or 14 hours a day could devote the time to daily study. Most of the common people could not. However, the synagogue system was built around education and as such it recognized bright intelligent minds. The son of a poor family could achieve respect and status, even financial support, if he demonstrated top intellectual abilities. He could be given the time to study God's word, and be recognized as a leader in the synagogue.

So we can safely say that for many years everything went extremely well for Jairus. He was admired and respected as a wise man, an intellectual. He had the leisure to pursue his studies, to think great thoughts, to ponder the mysteries of the universe. You can well imagine that he was respected and the crowd made way for him as he approached Jesus. But now, none of that mattered for his world was crashing down around him. His beloved daughter, the joy of his life, had become deathly ill. Here Luke makes the point to tell us she was his only child. Suddenly the wealth, the books, the great ideas and thoughts, all the admiration and respect of others, it all seemed utterly worthless to Jairus. He was desperate, willing to do anything for his little girl. This wise and dignified man comes to Jesus and falls at his feet, begging for him to come and heal his daughter.

Now, I want to pause at this point for just a moment, and if you were here last week, compare Jairus to the man with the evil spirits that Jesus healed just a few verses before this. If you remember, he too falls at the feet of Jesus, but the evil spirits scream out, "Do not torture us!" They were terrified of Jesus. I said this is because Jesus, as God Incarnate, has both tremendous love and incredible power. But the demons cannot comprehend God's love. All they know is God's power and that frightens them. In contrast, Jairus does recognize the power that Jesus has, but is hoping that Jesus' love, compassion, and mercy will motivate Jesus to come and help his little girl who is suffering so. So of course Jesus cares about this man and his terrible situation. Of course he will go with him.

But then our story is interrupted. There is a woman in the crowd. She has been sick for twelve years. It probably was not something that came on her suddenly. It was a chronic problem that was mild at first, something uncomfortable and annoying, but over the years this disease had taken over her life. Her condition had steadily deteriorated, and she was at the end of her rope. Over in Mark's gospel it says that she had been to many physicians, spending all that she had, and the treatments had only made things worse. Our text for this morning is by Luke, and in the letter to the Colossians he is referred to as a physician. So there might be a hint of professional pride here. Luke does not say the other physicians made things worse, only that no one could cure her.

I mentioned the contrast between Jairus and the mad man we discussed last week. There is also a striking contrast between Jairus and this unnamed woman. He is a powerful, respected leader of the community. She, on the other hand, was a social outcast. Because of Jewish purity laws, her illness made her ritually unclean. She could not go into the synagogue where Jairus taught. Anyone who touched her would be regarded as ritually unclean. So while Jairus had a wife and daughter, this woman was most likely alone, either divorced or unable to marry in the first place. Jairus was probably wealthy, while she had nothing. If at one time she had any resources, they were all now depleted. She was poor, alone and desperate. You could not have two more different people than these two. But at the same time, they both are in great need and that puts them on the same level. When we come to God in need, our differences melt away. Our focus is only on God and what God can do for us.

But I think she is like Jairus in one other way besides their need. I think she too was very intelligent. Out on the edge of the crowd, staying unnoticed in the background as much as possible, she had been watching and listening to Jesus. She thought it all over and had come up with a plan. She had seen Jesus heal others, many who were desperately sick, and perhaps she had noticed that often Jesus touched the one who needed healing. Now, it would have been shocking and unthinkable for a woman in her condition to ask a rabbi to touch her. He would be ritually defiled if he did that. But, what if she touched him? Furthermore, she did not need to actually touch his body, if she just touched the hem, our text says the fringe, of his clothes, well that is not really touching him, now is it? He would not be defiled if she did that. It had to be done carefully and discretely, when there were a lot of people around. But all she needed was to reach out and touch... once, just once... and it could make all the difference to her.

So that is what she did. She touches the hem of his cloak, just once. Immediately she knows that she has been healed! She can feel it! The pain, the suffering, the social isolation, the ritual impurity, all that she has endured for twelve long years, it is suddenly all gone for good.

We can guess what she would have preferred to happen at that point. She wanted to melt into the crowd with no one knowing what just took place. But Jesus knew what was going on. Somehow he feels that someone has tapped into that power within him. He stops everything, standing perfectly still. You can imagine a hush coming over the crowd as Jesus looks around and says, "Who touched me?" Nobody answers. "Who touched me? Who touched my clothes?" Jesus insists. Everyone is quiet until Peter says, "Uh... like, everyone, Lord." But Jesus is looking for a particular person, someone who has touched him, just once, for a very specific reason. A few moments pass. Then the woman steps forward. Terrified and trembling, before all those people, she tells him the whole truth. She admits the nature of her illness, as well as her healing. But instead of being shocked, or scolding or punishing her, Jesus commends her by saying, "Daughter, your faith has made you well." Literally, "Your faith has saved you."

Just once, in this one story, do we find the name of Jairus. Just once, in this story, do we find Jesus calling anyone "daughter." Nowhere in the gospels does Jesus refer to anyone else in that way. So what? Why is that significant? Well, you see, she is no longer an outcast. By calling her daughter, Jesus reestablishes a family connection. He brings her back into the community. That is why Jesus was insistent on finding out who she was. He was not trying to embarrass her about something very personal. He was showing how much he cared. He was not just concerned about her physical health, but her connection with God. It was her faith that has

made her well. He is also concerned about her loneliness and isolation. He wants her to belong to the community again, to be connected with others, so that her life will be complete and whole.

Then the scene shifts, in a dramatic turn. The text says that while he was still speaking, some people come to Jairus with the horrible news that his daughter is dead. Jesus overhears this message, and says to this distraught father, “Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved.” Actually he uses the same words he just said to this woman. “Your faith has saved you,” is now, “Have faith and she will be saved.” It is like he is saying to Jairus, “Did you see what just happened here? This woman had faith that just one touch would make a difference. If she can have faith in a little thing like touching the fringe of my cloak, you can have faith too. Do not be afraid, but wait and see what happens.”

They go on to Jairus’ house, where there is a commotion going on with all the people weeping and wailing. Jesus goes into the house where the little girl lay. He brings only her parents and Peter, James and John, his closest disciples. Without lengthy prayers or dramatic gestures, Jesus reaches out and touches the child, just a simple touch, and says, “Child, get up!” She gets up and is hungry. Jesus tells the parents to get her something to eat.

The text says, “Her parents were astounded.” The Greek word used here is *ekstasis*. We get our English word “ecstasy” from this Greek term. We could just as easily say these parents were ecstatic, and with good reason. But there is a little more to this word. The root meaning of this word *ekstasis* is something like “to change places.” The idea is that once things were one way but now they are completely different. Sometimes when there is a drastic change in emotions we might say, “She was beside herself.” We mean that she was not in the same place she was before this event happened. That is something of the idea of *ekstasis*.

Now, isn’t that a perfect way to describe what Mr. and Mrs. Jairus must have been feeling? They were ecstatic! They were beside themselves with joy. They had truly changed places. One minute they were grieving, desperate without hope, their only child, their sweet, sweet daughter was gone. The next minute she was back, alive, healthy, whole, and it is impossible to imagine their joy. Their happiness was beyond description. They were absolutely astounded.

That sick woman who touched the cloak of Jesus, she must have felt the same way. Here she was sick, alone, someone to be shunned and avoided. Now she had changed places. She was strong, healthy, recognized as a daughter of the community, whole and complete. She must have been ecstatic, absolutely astounded.

I began by talking about one hit wonders. I don’t think anyone that I mentioned in that category regrets their success, even if it was just once. After all, Mark Hamill may only be remembered for Luke Skywalker, but according to the internet, he is worth \$18 million. In our story for today, we encountered two people who may not have achieved fame and fortune, but I am sure neither had any regrets. They were two very different individuals, a wealthy, respected man and a poor, suffering woman. They both came to Jesus on the same level, desperate for his healing power. They both are dramatically changed forever, and we do not hear anything more about them. But then again, we don’t need to. It is enough to know that by their faith their hopes were realized beyond anything they could have imagined. It happened just once, but that was more than enough.

The good news for us this morning is that Jesus came into this world so that we could be ecstatic, so that we can change places. Jesus came to show us just how much he does care. It does not matter how fierce the storm. It does not matter how many demons torment your soul. It does not matter if you are Jew or gentile, if you are a citizen or an immigrant or refugee. It doesn’t matter if you are male or female. It doesn’t matter if you are wealthy and respected or poor and an outcast. It doesn’t matter how hopeless it might seem. It doesn’t matter how desperate you are. The good news is that Jesus is here to change it all. Jesus is here to bring new life. Jesus is here for a new creation. The old has passed away and everything has become new. We can start over. Why, it is like being born again. And that is only the beginning... Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.