

Mark 5:21-43 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat^[f] to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea.²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet²³ 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.”²⁴ So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,²⁸ for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.”²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?”³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’”³² He looked all around to see who had done it.³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

³⁵ 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?”³⁶ But overhearing^[g] what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.”³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.”⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!”⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.**

We are in our second week of our series on the Art of Neighboring, where we are asking ourselves what it might mean, what it might look like, to apply Jesus' command to love our neighbors...to our actual neighbors, the people who live next door and across the street and across the hallway. We are talking about knowing and loving and caring for the people God has placed right around us. Hopefully you had a chance to work on your chart here this week, this chart that shows your 8 closest neighbors and asks you to first write down their names, then to write something you know about that person that you couldn't know by simply observing them from your front door, or from peering through the blinds, and then finally to write something you know from kinda the depths of this person's life--something about their hopes and dreams, or their fears, something they are going through right now.

As another part of this series, we have gathered you all into neighborhood zones and you are each invited to a neighborhood gathering of Westbury Church folks--we want you to see and get to know the folks in the church who live in your neighborhood so that you can begin asking, "What if this neighborhood looked the way God wants it to? Who would be here? How would we live? What would change?" Today at the end of worship I'm going to invite you to go to your neighborhood zone map here in the sanctuary and meet your neighborhood captains, find out when your event is, and start getting to know folks in your corner of the neighborhood.

As we continue in this series on The Art of Neighboring, it occurred to me that Jesus is a tricky example for neighboring, since he appears to be homeless for most of the Biblical record. Who are the neighbors of this wanderer who has no place to lay his head? But when I stopped to think about it, I think today's passage illustrates that Jesus seemed to find neighbors wherever he went. Or, rather, perhaps they found him...

Jesus is a busy man. He lands ashore and is immediately met by a crowd. One man, Jairus, stands out, begging Jesus, "Come, please, and heal my daughter." And even as he moves, the crowd follows him and presses in on him. I had a professor in seminary describe ministry as something like being nibbled to death by ducks--they don't have teeth, but they are constantly biting off a little piece of you. I think that fits Jesus here, especially as the woman comes up

behind him and touches his cloak. Everybody wants a piece of Jesus, a moment of his time, a surge of his power, and **this woman** didn't even bother asking him for it--she simply reaches out and grabs it.

I wonder if this resonates with you. So many people. So many things going on, pulled so many directions, so many things to do and places to go--so much that draws little by little on your time, and your energy. You are on your way, with important things to do, people who need tending to, like Jairus' daughter--how could you possibly have time to stop and help a neighbor. Or, even harder, how could you possibly have time to stop when your neighbor doesn't have an immediate need--how can we make time for just plain old neighboring.

Time is, for many of us, the biggest barrier to good neighboring. It's the first line of defense, the first thing we point to--"There are only 24 hours in a day, pastor, and there's only one of me." "I want to be a good neighbor, but I never seem to have enough time to get to know them--something always seems to come up."

Now, if you are anything like me, this is often either an excuse for avoidance, or an unwillingness to admit that it's not that I don't have time--it's just not a priority--it's usually not something I'm willing to make time for.

Pastors are some of the worst neighbors--I don't know if you know this. It's true. When I get home at the end of the day, at the end of a day full of...you know...caring for people, I am off duty. I am done caring about people--my home is the place where I don't have to care about anybody. At all. Except for me.

Ok, that's a little extreme, but surely you can relate. Seriously Pastor, leave my home time alone. Home is supposed to be my sanctuary, my place that is just about me.

So perhaps you and I need to shift our prayers--to pray less for God to show us how to be good neighbors, and to pray more for God to help us want to be good neighbors, to pray for God to help us find ways to love our neighbors in a way that not all of the power, not all of the energy goes out of us, so that we still have something left.

How did Jesus do this? He seems to be constantly available to this crowd and to whoever steps forward like Jairus, or whoever reaches out like the woman with hemorrhages. But that's not the whole story, is it? This passage we read today, with Jesus so available, so ready for interruption--that's not how he was all of the time. He wasn't constantly available to the crowd. We see times when he goes up to the mountain by himself, and other times when he pulls his inner circle to the side, and other times like this when he is available--almost intentionally available--to whoever might tug at his cloak. He was not constantly available to everyone, but he did have times when there was space for interruption, space and time for whoever was in his path, and in this passage he seems to be telling us that sometimes the interruption may be every bit as important as the life-and-death situation where he is already headed.

If we are a people who longs to orient our lives around following Christ, then perhaps there needs to be some intentionality in what we do with our time, in who we are available to. The temptation is to act as if our unavailability, our lack of time, is completely out of control. But it seems to me that the rhythms of Jesus' life and ministry allow for pockets of time when he is available only to God, times when he is available to a select few, and times when he is available to whoever God puts before him.

What is hard about neighboring is the very same thing that is hard about all relationships--it takes time. When I was in college I went on a date with a guy--it was maybe the second time we had hung out together, and we got to laughing about the awkwardness of getting to know one another. And I remember him saying, "I wish we could just skip to six months into the relationship, when we know each other better and we have something more to build on." We never made it to six months in that relationship, but I often have the same feeling when I try to connect with my neighbors--extending myself feels awkward and sometimes a little stilted. We don't yet know what we have in common--or maybe we don't have a lot in common, but I want to care about them.

Relationships take lots of little bits of time, lots of little moments of interaction and connection built over time. I want change to happen; I want to have these relationships, but I want some assurance that it will be worth my time and effort, that eventually this will make a difference in either your life or mine. It's as if we

are making a small deposit each day, or every few days, and we want to know that in the end, it will yield something, that all of this cultivating will bear some fruit, that it will work.

It would be easier just to say I don't have time.

It's a little bit like raising a child in the faith, isn't it? We baptized Tobe today and his parents and all of us made promises, we made vows to raise him in Christian faith. But those vows cannot be lived out all at once; our commitment to Tobe cannot just be fulfilled in an afternoon. It will take time, and a lot of little deposits of our time and our faithfulness to God and to him. It will take a week-in, week-out commitment of Sunday School teachers, and confirmation mentors, and VBS volunteers, and worship leaders, and that person who will be here to give him a high five each week in the hall of the church for no other reason than because you simply want him to know he is not invisible, but he is seen, and accepted, and loved. It takes time, little bits of time bound together and guided by a commitment to be available, to be used by God. You see, our availability is a response to God, who has made himself available to us. This moment, this power surge when the woman touches Jesus' robe--God has made it possible for the same power that flowed through him, to flow through us; we are agents of grace, we are like transfer stations of grace, where the grace of God comes in, and the flows out. What power we have been given.

In the earliest years of the Christian church, the followers of Jesus were seen as distinctive because of the way they loved and served their neighbors. Their culture was far more communal than ours is today, their lives were already far less private, but somehow their Christian way of life was exceptional compared to everyone around them. They managed to orient their lives around the desire to love people like Jesus did; they made adjustments, they made room in their lives in order to change their habits and their practices, to do things that at first did not seem normal or natural to them. So, I wonder, what adjustments could be made in your life?

For those of us who are so busy, that adjustment probably looks like starting to say no to something. If we are going to orient our lives around following Jesus, or around loving God and loving our neighbor, then we've got to back up and ask, "What needs to go? What is God nudging me to cut loose from my life?" Because

here's the deal, friends--God longs for and is working for abundance in your life, and abundance doesn't mean more and more things to do. It doesn't mean more and more stuff to have. God promises that abundant life is found in loving God and loving our neighbor--it's as simple as that. What does it mean to say that the most important thing God has asked us to do is to love God and to love our neighbor, and then in the next breath to say that we are too busy for these people. This is the most important thing, the driving force, the orienting principle for how we prioritize our time. The other stuff, the other things that fill our days--when you and I are at death's door there will still be a whole list of those things to get done. The question will be whether we used the moments and the days that we have been given to love and tend to the people that God has put in our path.

God has a part for you to play in someone else's life, in an episode of transformation, perhaps right outside your door. I'd say it's worth making a little time for.

Let us pray.

Loving God, we come to each day with so many demands on our time, so many little ducks nibbling away at us. Lord, we pause for you to interrupt us. We make ourselves available to you—to the interruptions you have for us, to the ways that you are calling us to reshape and reorient our lives. Give us the courage to change, and give us wisdom to know how. And pour out your grace in abundant measure, so that we might never fear that it will run out. In the name of your most precious Son, who was available to us—and available to you to the point of death on a cross—we pray in his name. Amen.

Summary: Jesus leads us to stop making excuses and be available to those who cross our path. If loving God and loving our neighbor are the most essential things for abundant life, then we can trust that abundance will be found when we make time for our neighbors.