



# First Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)

602 North Orchard Street Tacoma, Washington 98406

## Fifth Sunday After Pentecost - Juneteenth "Taking Jesus Seriously"



June 27, 2021

**Doug:** Good morning and welcome to worship at First Christian Church Tacoma, no matter where you are, we are so glad you've joined us this morning. As you prepare your hearts and minds for worship, I invite you to gather elements for communion, maybe grab a candle to light and remind you of God's presence, to take a deep breath and to feel God's presence in your midst. Let us worship our healing. God.

**Prelude**

FCC Trio (Ben, Sam, and Plum)

***Down to the River to Pray***

**\*\*Call to Worship**

Karen Murray

God's story is unfolding before us. In that story dwells a people and a Creator; intimately connected, ordained for growth and for healing of every ill. We gather to worship this living God. As we learn to trust the Spirit, in doing so, we are challenged to see ourselves and our world with the compassion of the one who made us and who holds us now. Let us marvel at the ways of our God. Let us worship!

**OPENING SONG**

FCC Trio

***O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing***

**LISTENING TO GOD IN PRAYER**

With Pastor Doug

Music with Multi Instrumental

***The Lone Wild Bird***

**Morning Prayer**

And now, we bring our joys and our concerns to our creator. The one who holds us fast in each moment of life, the one who points us toward him, what do you bring to God this morning? I invite you to close your eyes or get comfortable. However, that looks for you as we go to God in prayer, holy and healing God. God, who knows each of our names and our needs. God who shares our pain and shares in our crime. God who lasts with us and cheers us along the way. For the opportunity of this new day for the grace of community and for the love that you continue to extend to all of the creation moment, we give you our gratitude.

We come to you seeking healing of many kinds, and you ask us to take you seriously. Taking you seriously to see the ways in which your light and your love might move us to come to a new understanding of all the ways that you continue to abide with all of your people through all kinds of circumstances. That through the darkness, you bring to light. That through death, you bring resurrection, but in each new day, you give with it a sense of your spirit as close as, as deep as our lungs can take a breath.



So we pray for many among our beloved who are in need of your prayers, some in need of physical healing, and some in need of spiritual and emotional healing. Bind up the broken-hearted, those with privilege, and those with no privilege. For you teach us, halleluiah, that it is your will to bring healing to them, all of your people, and you call us to help in that. So guide us back to those points in which we can have an impact on those around us and in our world.

So that all may continue to be welcomed to the table, and not that all are welcomed only, but that all might be filled, that all might feel loved. That your healing may continue to transform all whom we meet along the way as you transform us. And together, we pray the prayer your son has taught us however we've come to know it saying:

Our creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

### **Bringing Words to Life** With Karen Murray

#### **Mark 5:23-41**

<sup>23</sup> 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." <sup>24</sup> So he went with him.

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

<sup>35</sup> 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?" <sup>36</sup> But overhearing<sup>[a]</sup> what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." <sup>37</sup> He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. <sup>38</sup> When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!”

### **Feasting on the Word with Pastor Doug** "Taking Jesus Seriously"

A man of deep faith is devastated by the news he has just received from his doctor. Unsure of what exactly this new diagnosis, Parkinson's, might mean for his life, for his spouse of several decades' life, and for his family and close friends, he informs one of those friends that in all the questions he had for his doctors, and for that matter, for God, the prayer he found himself repeating was simple: that he might be healed.

It wasn't until nearly twenty years later, commentator Michael Lindvall writes, when his good friend, now in the last debilitating stages of his disease, shared in one of his last visits that the prayers he and his wife had been praying to God all those years had been answered. “I *have* been healed,” he said, “not of Parkinson's, but of the fear of Parkinson's.”

As I read this story in one of the commentaries for today's text, I have to confess that a spike of anxiety jolted through my body as I imagined the scene as this man does everything within his power to come to terms with his diagnosis. I was brought back to my days in seminary as a hospital chaplain in training, back to those moments of crisis when I would witness loved ones learning about the news they couldn't bear to hear. For some, it was news that a loved one had died. For others, news that the meds intended to do one thing for one part of the body had caused unintended damage to another part. Like most of you, I too have known the pain of coming to terms with information about either my own health or the health of a loved one. When we're left in circumstances that are beyond our understanding, left with questions that we may not always want to hear the answers to, it is in those moments when left to our own devices when many of us start wondering how in the world we will move forward. The word “overwhelming” comes to mind, perhaps it is an understatement.

I wonder if you've ever found yourself in that place before. It turns out, we are all seeking healing of one kind or another, sometimes several at once. The main characters we meet in today's Gospel reading know well the pain of which we are speaking. Two people, a woman and a young girl – two people who are worlds apart and yet whose stories of suffering are ones that touch each of us deeply – for to be human is to experience death and suffering of some form in life. Perhaps this is why they remain unnamed; their stories are in many ways our stories.

Still quite early in Jesus' ministry, we've already read about many astounding things that Jesus had done for those who had come to see him and to witness the power which he claimed to possess in God. I suppose it's not much of a wonder why Jesus had gained such notoriety so quickly. Besides his political unfavor and the threat his very existence posed to the kings and tyrants of his day, it was the miracles he performed that left all those whom he encountered along the way, forever transformed for having met him.

And today, Jesus is just stepping off the boat and onto the shore again in a new place, when a whole new slew of people who are desperate for his help quickly crowd around him, seeking an answer, a way forward, seeking healing.

For a man like Jairus, it would be expected for his ailing daughter to receive the best of care and attention, as his position of authority and as a leader within the synagogue often granted him services and treatment that others with less prestige could only dream to have. What's striking here, nonetheless, is that Jairus, a Pharisee, is at his last wit, ready and willing to do anything it would take to help his dying daughter, goes to Jesus for help. And what happens next? Not even a few steps beyond Jesus' first encounter with Jairus is he stopped in his tracks by a tugging sensation on his robe.

It was the touch of a woman who was out of options. She had suffered hemorrhaging for twelve years, the same age as the girl Jesus had set forth to bring back from the dead. The text tells us more about her story – that she had spent those past twelve years searching desperately for a cure for her illness. Doctor after doctor would send her on her way, only to leave her in a worse condition, and no doubt with more medical debt than she could likely bear to think of.

I'd like to pause here and name a theological pickle that I can almost guarantee is something you've already thought of – it doesn't work this way. The hard truth behind why I believe this story can be so hard to hear, is that it reminds us of those situations in our own lives in which death was the next step, be that of a loved one, or a relationship, death of a chapter in life, or maybe the end of a life-giving career. And we know, it's true that there are illnesses in our midst about which scientists know very little, and limits to the healing and symptom-clearing blessing of modern medicine, amazing and groundbreaking though it may be.

I'll never forget the reaction I got from one of my close friends when I told them I wanted to go into ministry. "Okay...but you don't literally believe in this stuff, do you?"

The question is a fair one – and to add to the theme of honesty this morning, it is perhaps one of the big reasons many find Christian theology not very helpful at best, and at worst,

harmful, when it leaves us with nothing more than to blame ourselves for the inexplicable parts of life that are most painful, or to gaslight us into defining “faith” as some sort of special medicine that is only available to some.

One of the beauties of being part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is that we all get to determine what elements of faith work for our own experiences and intellect. While for some, interpreting stories like this one in a more literal sense seems helpful, it can serve as a true stumbling block for others to grow in their understanding of the nature of God.

My new favorite answer to the question “Do you take this stuff literally?” is “Not always, but I do take it seriously.”

So how we take this morning’s Gospel seriously?

I can’t explain to you how the miracle of resurrection works, or how it is that within one instant, a woman who had suffered greatly after 12 years could all of a sudden be cured. My understanding of God doesn’t really seem to match the God we see illustrated in this story, and that’s okay, too.

So this morning, let’s take this text seriously as we consider the ways in which we are seeking healing, as individuals, as family units, as a nation, as a world.

A few observations:

Jairus’ daughter and the woman both come from very different walks of life. While Jairus’ family is one of prestige and importance, the older woman has likely experienced some form of ostracization as her illness would prevent her from entering the temple – marked impure.

I wonder how Jesus would heal those who seek him today who possess power and prestige. I wonder who in our midst might fit that bill. And who might it be today, stuck in debt, left with no more options than the rich one, yet burdened by a whole additional set of societal challenges with no access to proper healthcare and the imminence of a deathly illness all the same?

Jesus proclaims in each instance: “Your faith has made you well.”

In other words, take me seriously.

When you encounter others who are suffering, take me seriously, stop, listen, help. When you find yourself alone, take me seriously – ask me for help, tell me what you need. Trust that I'll be with you no matter what. Trust that not even death will separate you from the confounding love of our God – that the temporary pain of life, is temporary, that in today's worry and stirring for answers, comes tomorrow's revelations about the journey in which we notice that through it all, God was right there at our side.

Take me seriously – heal the systems of our government and society that ostracize women and shame them for their bodies – heal the suffering of neighbors by being there – by giving them a call, by reaching out to God when you don't know what to do next.

He's saying, take me seriously, recognizing the power you have to help others seek the kind of healing they're after, recognizing that sometimes even when you don't have all the answers, that your presence is enough, that your words are enough, that the Spirit will fill in the cracks and uplift us, should we allow it to fully fill our lungs anew.

The mark of the Christ in our world is an arrow which points us toward seeing the God in our midst, seeing the life that can come even from scary and unpredictable places – defining healing not by the physical limits of our perspective, but as that which connects us back to closeness with the love of our God, the life that nourishes and uplifts, the spark that helps us through today's struggles and which gives us just what we need to move forward.

And our call is to be agents of that kind of healing. To be repairers of the breaches that block others from growth, and just as importantly, to place our trust back in the God who made us and holds us even now.

It starts with saying yes to the path that is forming ahead where God will greet us at each moment in life. It starts with taking Jesus seriously. For God will reveal the way ahead.

Amen.

### **Feasting on the Word with Music**

With the Trio:

***All Hail the Power of Jesus Name***

### **Communion**

With Pastor Doug

Music by Ben Smith, piano solo:

***What Wondrous Love***

## **Invitation**

One of the things I really love about this morning's text, difficult and challenging though it may be is that after Jesus heals Jairus' daughter and brings her to life, he says he immediately instructs those around her to feed her. Jesus, doesn't take the loaf of bread himself. And he doesn't pour the cup himself. He tells the people who are there with him to do that.

That's where we come in, where we come in to receive this bread and cup that is offered freely and given out of nothing more than unconditional love. And then we go out into the world and continue to figure out how to be agents of this kind of healing that sustains and uplifts and loves beyond death beyond illness. And it's the mystery of this meal, which equips us to do that.

## **Words of Institution**

So as we do each week, we gather again around this blessed table that Jesus has set. And we remember the night when he gathered with his disciples in an upper room, he took a loaf of bread and giving thanks for it, he blessed it. And then he broke it saying, take of this. All of you, this is my body given for you.

After supper, Jesus took the cup and giving thanks for it, poured it out and said, drink of this, all of you. This is my blood poured out for the forgiveness of the sins of many. As often as you gather, have this bread, drink of this cup, for all are welcome to this table. So let us partake of this holy feast, let us pray.

## **Prayer**

Oh God of this meal. Bless this bread and cup that they will nourish our bodies to go out into the world and to continue doing your will. Seeking healing in our own lives and for those whom we encounter along the way. We give you thanks for the blessing it is to dwell with you and to know the love that Jesus extends. Even in those points of confusion, you call us to take him seriously.

So bless us as we receive this bread and cup so that we may go back out into the world and take it seriously to find new ways of healing to let your light shine, wherever we go in Christ's name. Amen. Let us partake of this feast.

Amen.

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## **Benediction**

Pastor Doug

Hear now these words of blessing, as we depart. Dear friends, life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who journey the way with us. So be swift to love, make haste to be kind and the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Give her of new life. Be with you this day and always take Jesus seriously for there is healing to be done.

Amen



**Postlude**

***Showers of Blessing***

FCC Trio

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