

## **Unimaginable**

Menno Mennonite Church

June 27, 2021

**Purpose:** To proclaim God's faithfulness in all things, even that which passes our expectation and imagination.

**Message:** God comes to us in all things with faithful love and accompaniment.

**Scripture:** Mark 5:21-43 (I will read); Psalm 130; Lamentations 3:22-33

**Synopsis:** Some things don't bear thinking about. Not because they cannot happen or will not happen, but that the possibility, when considered, is so immense that we simply cannot imagine it. The imagination of the possibility simply demands so much mental energy to entertain we cannot sustain the exercise at all.

This is where the people of our story are in this time. Jarius, the leader of the synagogue was facing, immediate, the death of child. The woman had endured the unendurable for decades. In this interwoven story we bring Jesus into these desperate unimaginable situations. He feels the pressure, the grief, the impossibility of it all, yet even here we have him bear witness to the fact that where God is, nothing is impossible. This must remain our hope and our declaration even when our imaginations come to and end.

Mark 5:21-43

<sup>21</sup> When Jesus had crossed again  
in the boat to the other side,

a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea.

<sup>22</sup> Then one of the leaders of the synagogue  
named Jairus came and, when he saw him,  
fell at his feet <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 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!”

<sup>42</sup> And immediately the girl got up  
and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age).

At this they were overcome with amazement.

<sup>43</sup> He strictly ordered them that no one should know this,  
and told them to give her something to eat

There is such a thing as too much imagination. As utterly critical it is to be blessed with and exercise one's imagination there are things that we would just as soon leave, broadly, outside our realm of possibilities lest contemplating the possibilities in their wide a varied nature—seldom if ever good—gets the better of you and takes over your life. I will always remember receiving the phone call from Emily at the beginning of the odyssey that would culminate in Luke's birth. Having just arrived home after more than 2 hours over icy, deteriorating roads having left her in Saskatoon in the hospital for what was to be a few tests and observation, the phone rang with Emily telling me to get back in the car as things were not going well, and we may well have a baby by the end of the night, if not in the coming hours, one way or another. At that moment, I was left to contemplate the realistic possibility of loosing our child, my wife, or both well before I had really exercised the notion of fatherhood into my head. The imagination of being widowed along the way hadn't ever entered my mind, even hypothetically. Fortunately, that wasn't how things turned out, but those hours of getting back to where I just left were among the most brain filled and prayerful of my life. The unimaginable had come, and I, we had to sit with the consequence and try to imagine something beyond it.

We each know this place. If we have not lived it as a first-hand experience, then we know it as a distant brush with the bolt-of-lightening other worldly nature of the sometimes fickle hand that life offers. We know what it is to be at a loss to know what to do, to say, to think, to feel, sometimes even when we are reading the morning news. Such it has been in this week—buildings collapse, gunmen shoot, the graves of the innocent victims of churchly brutality are recognized by the hundreds, and we know that this is but a beginning. I cannot name the number of times where my morning Facebook scroll leaves only “Lord, have mercy” ringing in my heart. These are the things that we all imagine because we must—we can all name them—but when we do we actively dismiss the possibility not because it is impossible, but because the energy that we would use in holding that imagination would be so encompassing that it would be hard to function. If we realistically considered the full possibilities of what can happen on the roads, we may not be eager to get behind the wheel.

The folks we encounter this morning are those who are dealing with the unimaginable. The illness, then loss of child; the unendurable illness that no one could heal for decades. It is the unimaginable that they bring to the feet of Jesus and the unimaginable that they receive in return. It is marvelous, miraculous, stupendous to be sure, but also for us unimaginable as well,

so far out of our realm of science and opinion as to render these stories, for some, as credible grounds for disbelief as much as they are particularly grounds for faith, for inspiration, for hope. What do we do with the imagination of such things? We see them, we imagine them—we hear the amazement, the wondered muttering, the confused doubts that such things could happen, the awe when what could not be imagined rises from her bed and asks for some food. It is amazing, beyond our experience of the imagination and the way things are.

It is always a bit tricky to sit with these stories—the miracles and the painful experiences—and to know what, if anything to say. The fact of the matter is that this unimaginable God of ours did these things. He healed the sick, but he did not heal every sick person, ending illness. He raises the dead; though not every one who has left us too soon, or who we have not been able to meet at all. Plenty of people in Jesus' day still experienced the unimaginable loss of their children, and they continue to do so. Suffering is part of life, and one of the marks of the church. But those miracles that the Gospels record were signs of the inbreaking kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed. The miracles do happen too—we have heard of that as well. We know that God's kingdom has a way of breaking into this one now and again, giving a preview of coming events. Just as we have our sad stories, we have our miracles stories as well; of the car that did not collide with ours, the person who has gotten, mysteriously better, and all the rest. This is the great mystery of faith, holding all of this together. Sometimes we cannot imagine what God could possibly be thinking along the way.

But perhaps that is some of the point. We read these narratives of the Bible with relish and long afterthought, seeing what the people of the time could barely even conceive of. The book of Isaiah lays out beautifully the foresight of the messianic healer and the servant of all. We read the words of comfort and proclamation of what is about to be right up against the completion of the promise—comfort ye my people paired with For unto us a Child is born—and we are given to thinking that this was how everyone experiences it. We forget that the real time living of this was a 500 year interval between the vision of the prophet and the coming of the Christ. During this time there must have been any number faithful followers who concluded that the vision simply did not apply, was out of date, or basically wrong. When Jesus does show up they certainly are not all on the same page as to know what was going on or to suppose that the one who they we being amazed by could possibly be the one on whom they we waiting. Their imaginations we as limited as ours because they had trained them to look for one thing only, and

then are surprised when God shows up in a way that they had least expected. I think it is an endemic human trait that we resist the unimaginable simply because it makes the most sense over all. This is true of that which we long for as much as it is for what we dread.

The point of the miraculous of our stories, our hoping is to help us to train our imaginations into the discipline of the unimaginable. First of all we are reminded here that Jesus cares about the unimaginable, painful moments of our lives. He is moved not just by the Jarius' plea—the person of power here—but also the woman who can only touch his cloak in the hope that there might, even here, be some hope. In this, she earns not a rejection as she was obviously anticipating, but the title Daughter—the only person referred to as such in the whole of the Gospels by Jesus. These stories of healing, one sandwiched in between the next, gives us a glimpse of the power and possibility of a God who does come and addresses the needs that are there. Not always in the ways that we would wish, on our time tables and with our sense of who should or should not be healed. But healing does happen, and that is something that takes some consideration and no small measure of faith to fully embrace. Jarius, the leader, has his limited imagination too: perhaps Jesus could heal the sick, but once he has been told she was gone, why even other anymore? He too needed to work through the unimaginable goodness to come to something that he wasn't expecting.

We need to practice our imaginations to know what is possible. As I watch the kids and their fanciful imaginations of all sort of things (who knew there were so many lava floors around), I am reminded of their need to rehearse the possibilities of the world for them right now, no matter how far beyond us it may seem. The other day they were practicing taking care of each other when they were sick, just because they could imagine it.

In our faith the same is true. By sitting with the one who can do far more than we can ever imagine (as we pray from time to time) and the things that are possible when God shows up, we better tune ourselves to see and know the God who comes to us in the unimaginable moments of life. Because often the promises that we lean on, the miracles that we ask for—big small and in between—do not always come in the packages that we expect them to or the ways that we would desire. That doesn't mean that care does not come, or that the prayer has gone unanswered. It just might not be in the way we could have ever imagined before, and that is good. We can practice and embrace that good news as we sit with the miraculous we can all hope to see, even if it is sometimes beyond us as it is unimaginably good.