

July 1, 2018, Mark 5:21-43
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Jairus and the Hemorrhagic women

The terrible news about the shooting of five members of the Baltimore Gazette this past week made me think about how exposed news people are these days to judgment, criticism and also the anger that seems epidemic in all aspects of our society. I remembered the reporter from ABC news who came to interview us about the Tee shirt memorial and the planned March for Our lives rally on the church lawn. In conversation with her, I asked what it was like to be in a profession where you are questioned, doubted and sometimes ostracized in the culture of outright tensions and antagonisms towards reporters and news services.

She told me this story:

During the first major snow storm of the season she was out doing an on the street interview. The snow was swirling around her as she approached a pedestrian and asked,

“Sir what do you think of all this snow?”

To which he yelled back at her, “Fake News”.

“But it is snowing,” she offered.

“Fake News!” He yelled again.

She was startled and tried again,

“But sir clearly you can see it is snowing, what do you think?”

“Fake news!!”, He yelled again as he scurried away.

She was dumbfounded. The tragedy of the accusation of Fake News is that there is no place for conversation, just a command to be silent, because whatever is to be said, is contaminated and without merit or truth.

The Fake News phenomena is not new news. Jesus himself was the victim of many fake news accusations. The two miracle stories read this morning are part of many in the New Testament, and they would become part of the fake news claims against Jesus and his ministry. They provided his accusers evidence to subvert his ministry by characterizing miraculous healings as blasphemy and heresy, thus becoming the indictment against him down that fateful road in Jerusalem

Throughout his ministry, the synagogue leaders deny Jesus’ authority as God’s presence, calling him a charlatan and a sinner. . He was condemned for his acts of compassion over doctrine and dogma, and for his inclusion of all people to God’s table. Jesus detractors were relentless in the indictment of him. He is not the truth they said. He is not of God. These miracles and teachings are false teachings and essentially fake news.

But as Mark's Gospel shows, desperation has a way of changing the perception of what is true and what is not. Jairus, the Synagogue leader terrified for his daughter's life has hoped for the truth of the miracle rumors and in a Hail Mary effort appealed to Jesus to save his daughter. And then the hemorrhagic woman, sick and weakening, comes to Jesus because she has faith that the stories of the healings are true. And Jesus heals them. This is not fake news, but the real news of a messiah that will save many. The other reality is that his actions will prove fatal to him.

"Don't tell anyone." Jesus says, because he understands that this news will give him a front row seat to treason against Rome and ultimate crucifixion.

So, what are we to do with the Fake News in our own lives? Where is our responsibility to glean what is fact and what is fiction? It sometimes seems impossible to know what truth is because we are bombarded with so much information from our phones, computers, televisions, newspapers, gossip and word of mouth. News that comes at us rapidly and many times as it is unfolding.

It's a far cry from the experience that the earliest American patriots had 242 years ago. This 4th of July we celebrate those patriots and the birth of this Nation as it broke away from the tyranny of England. That was an age when news took months to be conveyed, and it makes me wonder, how did our earliest ancestors manage the discernment of what was true or false news?

There is a popular, yet unsubstantiated story told that King George of England wrote in his journal on July 4th, 1776, "Nothing of great import happened today! "

Talk about Fake News!

Those earliest Americans didn't have up to the moment information to apprise them of the state of the nation, but they did have an abiding love for their right to justice, freedom and self-determination. They believed in something good, and there was a collective sense that the human rights of all individuals were something worth defending, and something worth fighting for.

In the words of George Washington, anticipating war with England wrote:

"Our cruel and unrelenting Enemy leaves us no choice but a brave resistance, or the most abject submission; this is all we can expect. We have therefore to resolve to conquer or die. Our own country's honor, all call upon us for a vigorous and manly exertion, and if we now shamefully fail, we shall become infamous to the whole world. Let us therefore rely upon the goodness of the cause, and the aid of the Supreme Being, in whose hands victory is, to animate and encourage us to great and noble actions".

Washington later added in another document these thoughts to the American cause:

"And while we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion to the distinguished

character of patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian.”

George Washington was clear, that in the country’s resistance to tyranny, we must behave as both citizens of this country and as faithful citizens of God’s Kingdom. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus models what that means to be a good citizen in God’s Kingdom. Two miraculous healings occur. One for the hemorrhagic woman, who is nameless and without place or social worth, and the other for Jairus, the respected, and prominent, member of the synagogue. Jesus makes it clear that from the least of society to its most prestigious members, that all people by their faith, are citizens of God’s kingdom and all are equally worthy of God’s attention, care and inclusion.

I believe that is what it means to be a good citizen of this country, as well. All people must be equally regarded as worthy of the dignity of their being, and all have a right to freedom, democracy and self-determination. That is what I love most about this country!

Now if you are worried I am about to preach politics, be assured that politicians are far from my mind right now. What I am talking about is the collective citizen, each and every one of us as we stand here today, the heirs to those remarkably brave Americans 200 years ago. Those common people fought against oppression and injustice and the tyranny of a country that regarded them as OTHER. Those citizens united as one and bravely accepted their responsibility to God and their neighbor.

As George Washington said, “I had always hoped that this land might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong.” That is what I always hoped for my country.

But sadly, it has been a long time since I have seen that America, as we seem to be beset by an illness of spirit and action, that is breaking my heart. I now live in a country where its citizens claim they can only be safe when walls are being built to keep undesirable people out. That wall harkens back to the terror of the Berlin Wall of our past, and it frightens me.

I live in a country now where in order to have a simple wedding cake a lawyer has to make an appeal to the supreme court. A country where we value the right to own assault weapons over the safety of our children. A country where you are banned from coming to our shores simply because you live in a land that worships God in the Muslim faith.

A country where dissent expressed in the spoken or written word, or the simple and benign action of taking a knee means that that you are branded as treacherous and unpatriotic. A country where we are willing to tolerate the despicable act of separating children from their families at our borders and placing them in detention centers reminiscent of the United States Japanese internment camps of WW2.

And along with that, a country unwilling to accept the responsibility that despite empty gestures to undo this horrendous act, that the damage done to these children will haunt them all of their lives. These things devastate me.

Where is our courage as Americans to confront injustice? Where is our faith in a loving God that encourages us to do good and kindness towards others and one another? Where is that beautiful American voice that cried out 200 plus years ago, making it clear that we are Americans and that means something, and it stands for something honorable and worthy? Or at least it should.

I find hope in the words of patriot Joseph Warren written after the Boston Tea Party in 1775:

“Our country is in danger, but not to be despaired of. Our enemies are numerous and powerful; but we have many friends, determining to be free, and heaven and earth will aid the resolution. On you depend the fortunes of America. You are to decide the important question, on which rest the happiness and liberty of millions yet unborn. Act worthy of yourselves.”

Warren is right! Our country is in danger and as citizens of this country, and as citizens of God’s Kingdom, we must be worthy in our actions, because so many in the world rely on us to do so. The actions of those earliest patriots make us responsible for all our brothers and sisters who turn to us in hope and faith that they will be treated justly, that they will be given the chance to prove their willingness to embrace this country as their own, and that they will be treated with grace and dignity.

And if in this 21st century we have given up on what our ancestors fought and died for, let us remember this, that as Christian people Jesus is unequivocal as to what we must do. There can be no standing down from his teaching that we Love God with all our heart and we love our neighbor as ourselves. We must be firm in our commitment to that, because that is what Good citizens do!

Otherwise we stand for nothing.
How tragic would that be?

Amen.