

Ash Wednesday – February 22, 2023

Text: Mark 5:24b-34

Theme: 7 Themes - Theme 1: Instant Perfection-Patient Relationship

**During the Lenten Midweek services and concluding with Easter Sunday we will be looking at a book by the Rev. Dr. Daniel Paavola, a professor at Concordia Wisconsin. The book is entitled Patience & Perfection and it is designed around seven themes in Scripture that come around again and again. Once you understand the seven themes, all of Scripture becomes clearer. Sometimes we look at the Bible and become overwhelmed. It is a complicated book with complicated themes but Dr. Paavola's has a way of distilling the Bible into very practical themes which really help us apply God's Word to our lives.**

**This week we will look at the first theme of Scripture: Instant Perfection-Patient Relationship. Look at the creation of the world. In an instant, God created perfection. He just spoke and called it all into being and it was good. So why doesn't it work that way in our lives? Sure, it might happen occasionally. We might have seen an immediate miraculous cure occur. Someone is healed from a disease or an injury that everyone thought was terminal. Or we might experience a miraculous event like a near-miss on the freeway when there did not seem to be any way to avoid a horrific collision or when people walk out of that horrific collision alive.**

**But, it seems to me that we are more often like St. Paul with his thorn in the flesh from which he prayed and prayed to be delivered and apparently never was. What do we say of that? God is the God of perfection and we are His children but our lives are not perfect, not at all!**

**But look at this reading from the Gospel according to Mark. Mark 5:24b-34**

**“And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, ‘If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.’ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my garments?’ And his disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’ And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. And he said to**

**her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'"**

**That woman had been waiting for over 12 years to be healed. What happened in that 12 years? How did her life change? What did God do during that time? Sometimes we treat God like that fire alarm that you see in hallways of public buildings. It has a firehose and an axe behind a glass door and says "Break Glass in Case of Emergency." We like to keep God in our hip pocket in case of an emergency but we don't always want Him messing around in our lives all the time. Like when you are all ready to commit that secret sin that we like to hide away from everyone. We don't want God showing up. But when we get that scary diagnosis or hear that hard news, we want God to be Johnny on the Spot! God is not interested in being our "break glass in case of emergency" God. He wants a relationship with us every moment of every day. When we have that kind of daily relationship with God, it is often during stress and hardship that the relationship grows the most.**

**If you have read the chapter, you remember Dr. Paavola's Model T story. I got to hear him tell this story live. Like many boys, Dr. Paavola and his father had an imperfect relationship that was generally mediated by his mother. Fathers and sons, being two bulls in the pasture don't always communicate on a deep level and fathers**

**often find out what their sons are thinking and feeling from their mothers because boys will talk more freely with their mothers than they will with their fathers. When Dr. Paavola's mother died, he was afraid that his imperfect relationship with his father would die as well.**

**Then he thought of an idea. What if he found some other medium around which he could form a relationship. They both loved old cars so Dr. Paavola bought an old Model T and asked his dad to help him restore it. They spent months working on that car and while working, they could talk about things. Over time, his relationship with his father grew deeper than he ever imagined that it could. By the time his father died, he might have said that their relationship was nearly perfect.**

**Instant perfection is possible with God. When Jesus died on the cross, we were instantly perfected. We were wrapped in the robes of Christ, all sins forgiven and ready for Heaven. But God did not stop there. He desires a relationship with us during which time we can learn and grow into the perfection we will have for all eternity.**

**That's why he allows us to encounter and deal with hard things in this life. It's not that He is punishing us for some misdeed. He's**

**not capricious, mocking our weaknesses. He's not complacent, having gotten the world started and now ignoring it while He drinks Mai-tais on a nice beach somewhere. He is patient with us, helping us to learn and grow in our relationship with Him. The Model T is our life and we are invited by the God of all creation to join Him in building our life. It is a phenomenal invitation and once you see it, you can't unsee it all through Scripture with Noah, Job, Abraham, Jacob, David, Peter, Paul and so many others all invited by God to enter into a patient relationship with Him where their faith will grow and blossom.**

**The patient relationship is so much more helpful to us than instant perfection. It is how we come to know and love our God for all eternity.**