In the passage that we just read, Jesus and his disciples were travelling from town to town across the Sea of Galilee. In case you are wondering, the Sea of Galilee is a freshwater lake about 64 sq. miles and that’s about twice the size of Manhattan. It is the center of livelihood for business and agriculture, for fishermen and farmers, and a key transportation route throughout that region, kind of like the Mississippi River.

Wherever Jesus and his disciples went, it seems there was always a crowd waiting for them on the other side of the sea. As we have seen throughout the Bible, metaphorically when one crosses over a body of water, as in like baptism, it represents a rite of passage or some kind of transformation was about to take place. A new challenge or opportunity for renewal is on the horizon. We have seen this in the story of Jonah, with Moses leading the Israelites across the Red Sea, with Joshua across the River Jordan and into the Promised Land, and most notably through the baptism of the water and of the Spirit by John. The story that we read earlier is no exception, as Jesus and his disciples were travelling across the Galilee, it enlightens us to a new sign of God’s kingdom of what is to come.

Upon Jesus’s arrival “on the other side” of the Galilee, he was confronted immediately by a synagogue leader named Jairus whose daughter was dying with a severe illness. Jairus came desperately begging for Jesus to go with him to his home, so that he can lay his hands upon his daughter and she could be healed. Incidentally the name Jairus means *“****God Enlightens****”* in Hebrew.[[1]](#footnote-1)  We don’t know if Jairus had known Jesus in the past, or perhaps he exercised his elite and privileged status as a prominent leader of the synagogue to draw Jesus’s attention and made his personal appeals. Nevertheless, because of persistence of faith, Jesus complied and went with Jairus to see his daughter.

However, before he went, Jesus was interrupted by yet another bystander. This time by a woman who was suffering from hemorrhage for more than 12 years. Like Jairus, she too came desperately looking for healing from Jesus. She was hoping that she might catch a glimpse of Jesus or perhaps even just touch a piece of his garment, so that she would be healed. It was a long shot but hey, why not? What had she got to lose right?

This woman was a social pariah, who was never identified by name, nor do we know whose daughter or wife she might be. But one thing we do know for sure is that no one would dare to come near her because she was considered a spiritually uncleaned person due to her condition. But somehow, like Jairus, she was able to get to the front of the line and drew Jesus’s attention. She was an outsider looking in, hoping and praying that a miracle might happen. And it did, because of her persistent faith!

Both Jairus and the woman came with a similar plead for healing from Jesus, even though they might have come from different ends of the social spectrum. Unlike Jairus, who was a leader of the synagogue, the woman was considered an outcast because of her social and economic status. She had exhausted all of her financial resources.

Both this woman and Jairus’s daughter did end up being miraculously healed by Jesus, thanks to their persistence of faith. This only goes to show that Jesus did not discriminate when it comes to those who come genuinely seeking their faith. ***“Daughter, your faith has made you well”*** said Jesus to the woman, “***Go in peace and be healed of your disease.”*[[2]](#footnote-2)****Jesus came to heal those not only of their bodies but of their souls, regardless of ones’ social, economic or even legal statuses.**

Well, let’s fast forward to some 2,000 years later. What happened at the shore of Galilee also happened at the bank of the Mississippi, as I witnessed a couple of weeks ago when the *Presbyterian Church (USA)* gathered for its biennial *General Assembly* in St. Louis. More than 15,00 Presbyterians gathered to prayerfully discern what God is up to in this world and what our proper responses might be. **What act of miracles would God display among God’s people who were persistent in their faith? What opportunities of witness might we demonstrate in light of God’s compassion, peace, and justice in this world?**

Jesus showed up on the other side of the river to heal those who were crying out with their hearts. Jesus granted healing and compassion upon those who have been shunned or displaced by the various forms of injustices of society today…let it be of one’s race, gender, economic, social, lifestyle, or immigration status. The church recognized that it does bear a critical role in time such as this takng a stand in light of their faithful witnesses of the gospel…in God’s time and in God’s place.

As part of our Assembly on one of the Sundays, some of us visited local neighborhood churches in the city of St. Louis, including the neighborhood of Ferguson, where some of the race protests and riots, civilian/police confrontations took place in recent years. Some of us visited tall-steeple historic churches that have undergone dramatic missional transformation over the years due to the demographic shifts of their surrounding neighborhood. Some of us visited new worshipping community that might seem unconventional for some, nevertheless the gospel is still preached, the sacraments are still rightly administered, the people are still accepting Christ, and God’s name is still being proclaimed. We have heard many of their stories of faith and testimonies, as well as their hopes and dreams of their future. These were real faith stories that need to be told and real people who need to be heard.

Furthermore, through these congregational visits, we also see and hear stories of injustices where people are being morally and physically harmed each day due to the perpetual tolerance and abuses of our past. Often times we have chosen to look the other way instead of addressing the heart of the issues. We ask ourselves **What Would Jesus Do** in those kinds of situation? **Would Jesus choose only help the leader of the synagogue while abandon the socially outcast woman who was suffering for years?** NO! Jesus chose to give equal attention to both and healed them both indiscriminately. This was what Jesus did, what about us, What Would WE Have Done?

This system of injustice affects not only how we read and understand our Bible but also how we see God challenges us to respond through our actions both externally and internally. We may or may not be guilty of committing such crime directly but we might choose to remain silent in such intolerance. By doing so, we have perpetuated and condoned the sins of the perpetrators.

In one of the more contentious debates during the Assembly, the church wrestled with a proposal to make critical changes in terms of the structure of the governing body of the national office. For years, the underlying issues have been of how decisions were made and how many voices were not being equally heard...kind of like the outcast woman who came before Jesus pleading for healing and begging for her voice to be heard.

As part of an over-arching theme throughout this Assembly, the church examined how we must dismantle our past hierarchal mindset of a Kingdom (a top down model) instead of a kindom, which is a more lateral, collegial and equitable model of relating with one another, founded on mutual trust and respect. No more throwing crumbs under the master’s table to the dogs!!![[3]](#footnote-3) The microphone is open to ALL who wish to speak! Don’t we all eat the same bread and drink from the same cup. Everyone would have a voice, a vote, and a place around the table…this is what the heavenly kindom should look like, just as we are being reminded whenever we come before this table and celebrate this feast of thanksgiving here on earth, as it is in heaven.

Like Jairus’s daughter, Jesus reminded us that the church is not dead, but rather has undergone in a deep dormant sleep, in dire need of a “wake-up” call. **Miracles do happen by the persistence of one’s faith, among those who believe and feel passionate to take action.** As we have seen throughout our human history, time after time, God never failed to show up and deliver among those who placed their faith and trust in Him. God intervenes whenever God sees injustices are being served upon the people, especially among the people of color or the immigrant communities. We must let go of ourselves in grace and humility and let the Holy Spirit lead us and work among us. As Proverbs 16:4-5 reminded us that, ***“The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. 5 All those who are arrogant are an abomination to the LORD; be assured, they will not go unpunished.”***

Finally, in retrospect it seems rather providential (or “predestined” if you will in Presbyterian lingo) that our Assembly took place under the shadow of the *Gateway Arch* of the West, which symbolized the westward expansion of America across the Mississippi through the *Louisiana Purchase* back in 1803, although the acquisition of the land was a form of injustice to the Native American community. As part of the *Presbyterian Church (USA)*, weare reminded that **we too need to take some huge risks ahead when crossing over to the other side of the river and into uncharted territory.** No one knows for sure how deep that water might be or how fast the current is flowing, until we take a bold first leap of faith into the water, just as Moses did with the Israelites. As the prophet Isaiah reminded us that ***“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.[[4]](#footnote-4)***As Jesus reassured Jairus concerning his daughter, “**Do Not fear [of what lies ahead] but only believe**.”

We the church have been challenged to expand our horizons in terms of not only our ministry and how we relate to and co-exist with one another, not just among those whom we agree with but also among those who may have different opinions, perspectives and viewpoints from us. We must strive to work in unity for the upbuilding of God’s kindom as siblings in Christ and co-workers in God’s ministry.

So let us fix our eyes upon the future, beyond what stands immediately before us. We must be on the lookout to seize new opportunity, to capture the moment in which we can reach out and share God’s faith story with others. After all, this was exactly what we are commissioned and empowered to do, as Christ charged us to ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."[[5]](#footnote-5)*** In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *http://www.thinkbabynames.com/meaning/1/Jairus* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mark 5:34 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Matthew 15:21-28* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Isaiah 40:31* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Matthew 28:19-20* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)