

Sermon, *Your Faith Has Saved You*  
The Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels by the Sea, 6.30.24

I missed you all last week while I was on vacation in California. It was last Sunday morning, at 6:57 am California time, when I received an email that made me very happy. The email was from YouTube and it said, “You have successfully gone live on your channel.” That made me happy because it meant that you all were having a worship service – the priest showed up, Ethan and Mackenzie got the service up and running online. I was already awake and thinking about the church when the notification came in. That’s life, I suppose, as a priest. Even when I’m away I’m thinking about you all. I get two more Sundays off this year, and, unlike other years, I am planning on taking them – not because I want to necessarily but because I am supposed to (and therefore it is a healthy thing for me, my family and the congregation).

It's been a while since we've been back to California [we moved here from San Diego and my wife's family is in the San Francisco Bay Area which is also where I went to seminary]. I have to tell you; California has changed since we left. And no, it's not that I was holding back change and the whole place fell apart when we moved to Florida. No, but it has changed because it is hillier than when we lived there. After about twenty minutes of driving around in the Bay Area, I said, “When did all these hills get installed. I don't remember it being so hilly.” There are hills and valleys and sharp turns and very few flat spaces. California certainly has changed.

Or has it? Perhaps I am the one who changed. Living in Florida for five years has changed (flattened) my perspective. After all, the highest point in the diocese is the Skyway Bridge. I have become very used to having no hills or valleys but rather wide-open beautiful land and waterscapes. This reminds me of the phrase that Jesus said: *If you have faith, you can look at this tree, or mountain, and say, “Move” and it will.* Theologians have pointed out that faith moves the person, not the tree or mountain, so when one says move, it is the person who moves. After all, it's perhaps easier to move landscaping than to change one's mind. So, California has not changed that much but I certainly have.

Speaking of hills and valleys, the Gospel lesson for this morning has quite a few ups and downs. I preached on this passage three years ago (and it will come up three years from now) but I have to tell you, the passage has changed in those three years. I am reading it differently. Okay, obviously the passage has not changed; it is me who has. I'd like to share with you how I am reading it differently. And, like a car ride over the Sierra Mountain range, there are a lot of hills and valleys and many turns where you can't see where the road is going. If you are interested in taking that trip with me, put your metaphorical seatbelt on and let's have some fun.

Mark's Gospel was originally written in Greek – Koine Greek to be specific which was the everyday language of the region in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. We have to take that language and translate it into English and then apply the message to our lives. That's today's road map – read it, translate it and apply it to our lives. There was a religious leader, named Jairus (Gy [like “sky”] rus). His twelve-year-old daughter was sick. He ran to Jesus, fell at his feet and said, “Please come and lay your hands on my daughter so she can (and will) be saved and live.” If you noticed, the version printed in your bulletin says, “So she can be made well and live.” *Can-be-made-well* is translated from the Greek word *sozo* (like “Bozo” but with an “s” sound). Here is how I am reading it

differently this year. Since I had more time on my hands than normal, I did a deep dive into why, or how, we can translate “to save” into “made well”. The definition of *sozo* is *to save, to make safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction*. It is used about twenty times in the New Testament by all four Gospel writers, and by Paul, James and Peter. It was a well-known word in the Greek world used in many places outside of the New Testament in particular by Homer. But, somewhere along the line, the word was translated to be made well as from a disease. Perhaps to “save” someone from death of a disease – to make them safe and sound. Yet, I don’t think that applies to this passage. I think the reading of it “to save” is the correct one.

Mark most likely wrote his Gospel in the year 64. Not 1964 but 0064. The movement of belief in Jesus the Christ was under great suspicion and persecution at that time. (I am resisting calling it the Church because it doesn’t look like what we know as Church today, it was by and large a movement at that point) Yet, faith in Christ was saving people; day in and day out. The movement couldn’t be stopped because of the saving grace, the *sozo* that people were experiencing by surrendering to Christ. Although their lives were in danger, their souls were *sozo* – safe and sound. In other words, converts to the faith were finding that their faith had saved them.

Here's another way to look at it: the movement had converts dying, many of natural causes and others in prison (or worse). Even though they found themselves in prison for their faith, their faith had saved them and gave them life. The Apostle Paul wrote about this, while in prison, and the Book of Acts depicts this through the imprisonment (and release) of Peter and Paul. Converts found that there was more to life than our physical bodies. The saving power of Christ in Grace was saving lives – not of the temporal but of the eternal.

Let’s flash forward into the time when the Church became The Church. You can’t have people running around finding that their faith has saved them. What’s the Church for anyway? I think a new definition – made well – came into being stronger than “saved”. I think it’s time we took a fresh look at it and perhaps bring “*sozo*” back to its root of being saved.

The Greek New Testament was translated into Latin (and remained in Latin until the start of the Reformation). *Sozo* was translated into Latin with two words – *salvifico, libero*. *Salvifico* – to make safe and *libero* – to set free or liberate.

Jairus’ approach – Jesus, if you lay hands on my daughter she will be saved. Later on in the passage, a woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years thought to herself that if she simply touched Jesus’ cloak she would be healed. As Jesus walked by, she touched the tassel of his garment and immediately felt a change within her. Jesus looked around and asked who touched him. She stepped forward, fell at his feet, and told him everything. Jesus said, “Your faith has *sozo* you.” Saved you. Yet, it’s often rendered “Your faith has made you well.” But I think it is this: your faith has saved you. There is a Greek word for heal, or made-well, which is *therapeou*. It means to do service and also to heal, to cure, to restore to health. Mark uses this word, and it is frequently translated as “to cured” or “cured”. When writing the stories of Jairus’ daughter and the unnamed woman who was hemorrhaging, Mark did not write, “Your faith has *therapeou* you;” but rather, “Your faith has *sozo* you.”

Faith is believing in something we cannot see. Jairus and the unnamed woman both had faith – they believed – in something that they could not see. Because of their faith, the daughter would be healed, the woman would be cured. That was their faith. Going over hills in San Francisco, you can't see what's on the other side. But you have faith that there is something on the other side. In the hills and valleys of life, we cannot always see what is on the other side; but we have faith that it will turn out well. Likewise, with faith, we can be saved – made safe and sound in times when we don't feel all that safe or sound.

This is a good place to conclude the sermon, but I have one more thought for you. Where is your faith? What do you believe in that you cannot see?

Jesus said to knock and seek and ask. It is an active faith, not passive. We need to knock and to ask and to seek the Kingdom of God. Jairus and the unnamed woman did just that – they knocked and sought and asked. We too, in our faith, need to ask and seek and knock. This is why we say “to find Jesus” like he is hiding. We need to seek him. Ever play hide-and-seek with someone who wanted to be found? They'd make noises or whistle or somehow bring attention to themselves. Maybe that's what Jesus does but nevertheless he seeks to be found.

When I was an intern during seminary, my boss, the rector of the church, asked me to join him in a pastoral meeting with an angry parishioner. (She was not mad at me) Here's the situation, she was recently in the hospital, and no one visited her. The rector said she has every right to be mad and that they certainly dropped the ball. She said, “The last time I was in the hospital, it was for the birth of my son (who is now 41 years old) and the priest visited me.” He asked if the chaplain (it was in a Navy hospital) visited her. She said, “Yes, he first visited me and then a day or two later the priest from the church showed up.” He went on to explain that back then the chaplain would have alerted to the church priest; nowadays, they can't and won't. He then asked the parishioner who she called from the church to let us know that she was in the hospital. She replied, “No one, I just figured someone would find out.”

That's not the faith life Jesus calls us to. We are responsible for seeking and asking and knocking. For telling people when we are down, or sick, or in the hospital. We are to take people with us on our travels up and down hills and in the valleys of life. If someone is drowning, they need to yell and wave their arms and get the attention of the lifeguard or someone on the shoreline. Once they get their attention, they can be saved.

In your faith life, are you sitting in a room waiting for Jesus to show up? Or are you asking Jesus for help. Are you seeking *Him-Who-Will-To-Be-Found*? Are you asking; are you knocking? Once Jairus and the woman sought Jesus, through their faith, they were saved.

The Christian mandate is that we also bring others along – those who can't see over the next hill, those who don't know what lies ahead in the valley below or what is around the corner, we are called as followers of Christ to reach out to others and walk with them through the hills and valleys of life; to give the assurance of peace that God is there, just reach out to him. “Come, lay your hands on my daughter so that she will be saved and live.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.