

*Pastor Jana Schofield*

*Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA*

*Fifth Sunday after Pentecost*

*June 27, 2021*

*Lamentations 3:22–33; Psalm 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7–15; Mark 5:21–43*

After I graduated from college I spent 3 years as a youth minister for a large Lutheran church in Dayton, Ohio. The church had 3 pastors, including Pastor Rebecca. Before I even met Rebecca she had endured so much—the death of her 35-year-old sister to breast cancer, a divorce, and especially tragically, the death of her 42-day-old infant son, Cooper. Rebecca has since become a writer by vocation, and recently published a story about her experience of Cooper’s death in Oprah’s magazine, *O*.

Because her story and her writing are so profound, I will encourage you to read the story yourself—we’ll put the link to the article in this post if you’re watching online—but I thought of Rebecca and Cooper when I considered the 2 stories in today’s gospel—the story of a woman who was healed of her 12-year hemorrhage when she touched Jesus’ cloak, and a 12-year-old child who died and was raised again when Jesus took her by the hand.

Like the woman in this gospel, Rebecca suffered for years ... not with hemorrhaging, but with grief. And like the child in this gospel, Cooper died. Both the woman and child in the gospel, and both my friend Rebecca and her son Cooper, intimately knew suffering and death.

Of course, these gospel stories ended with miracles—the woman was healed of her disease, and the 12-year-old child was brought back to life. Rebecca’s grief, though, has never fully “healed”—I mean, how can you ever fully heal from the death of a child?—and Cooper did not come back to life.

I’m sure that you also have many stories in your own life when the endings don’t turn out miraculous. Diseases that didn’t go away, chronic pain that doesn’t stop, grief that leaves an open wound in your heart, relationships that remain broken. You too, like the woman and the child, like Rebecca and Cooper, intimately know suffering and grief, but like Rebecca and Cooper, your stories don’t always end up like the woman’s or the child’s in the gospel, either.

It’s important to remember that in the gospels Jesus healed diseases like the hemorrhaging woman’s, but he did not eliminate disease for everyone. Jesus stilled the storm on the lake as we heard in last week’s gospel, but Jesus didn’t calm every storm. Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter in this gospel, but he did not raise to life everyone who had died.

Not everyone experienced a miracle in the sense that what had happened was reversed. But the reason these stories are recorded in the gospel because they remind us, as Alan Padgett says, that miracles are simply signs of the inbreaking reign and realm of God. Miracles don’t always happen in ways that reverse what has taken place. Miracles don’t always look like hemorrhages that stop or children whose deaths have been reversed. Sometimes miracles are much simpler, much more subtle proof of the inbreaking reign and realm of God.

Did you notice in the gospel story that it was when the woman whose hemorrhage had stopped fell at Jesus feet in fear and trembling and *told him the whole truth*, that it was then that Jesus told her that her faith had made her well and named her “daughter” and told her “Go in peace?” If a miracle is simply the inbreaking reign and realm of God, sometimes the miracle is in the courage we have to come to Jesus and him tell the whole truth about ourselves. Sometimes the miracle is the relief we feel when we are honest with God, or with ourselves, or with others. The miracle comes when we release what we have held on to so that we aren’t the only one who carry our truth, so that we, like the hemorrhaging woman, can go in peace.

And did you notice in the story about Jairus' daughter that when Jesus showed up at their house, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. Although the miracle of this story is most clearly seen in the raising of Jarius' daughter, perhaps the inbreaking reign and realm of God had actually happened before that. The fact that Jairus' family was not alone in their grief, that others had gathered around them, was an inbreaking of God's realm. These friends cried with them, they laughed with them—even when it was laughing at Jesus for saying the girl was only sleeping—and then they shared in the joy and amazement of seeing a girl restored to health. Sometimes in the midst of our grief the true miracle is the community that surrounds us—the people who cry with us, laugh with us, and share in our joy—that proves God's kingdom does truly break in.

So let me tell you about the miracle that happened in Rebecca and Cooper's story.

Several years after Cooper's death, Rebecca did her seminary Clinical Pastoral Education requirement—what Intern Pastor Jory will do starting in January—as a chaplain at a local children's hospital. As part of her program, her cohort gathered weekly for training with various hospital staff. One week they were visited by a pathologist who had come to talk with the group about the autopsy procedure. At the end of the session, he passed around a copy of a sample autopsy form, and Rebecca recognized his signature at the bottom of the form as the same signature on the bottom of Cooper's autopsy form.

She asked for an appointment with the pathologist, who spent the next afternoon with her going through Cooper's full autopsy report, page by page, detail by detail with her. He also described how he trained medical students about the heart and lung system, often using preserved organs procured during autopsies to use in teaching, "injecting them with dye so students can see where problems have occurred and how repairs might be made."

And then the pathologist paused and said to her, "I still have your son's heart and lungs. Do you want to see them?"

Rebecca writes in stunning prose about what it was like to hold her son's heart and lungs in her gloved hands, to see the holes in his septum which led to his death. And then she writes this:

"Here is what I can attest to: I went into a hospital basement broken in certain places and returned mended, restored. I went there thinking I knew what I knew, autopsy report in hand, and discovered I knew next to nothing at all, for here my son had been all along, teaching."

The miracle Rebecca and Cooper experienced didn't reverse their circumstances, but the miracle came in the new life they both experienced—Cooper as a teacher, and Rebecca as a grateful and comforted mother.

Miracles—the inbreaking of God's reign and realm—often comes in the form of the discovery of new life, unexpected growth, friends who gather around you in your grief, and your honesty with God. The gift of grace is that miracles always come, and the promise of Jesus is that you don't need to look far. Amen.

*Quotes from "The Fateful Discovery a Woman Made After the Sudden Death Of Her Infant Child" by Rebecca Gummere, <https://www.oprah.com/inspiration/dealing-with-the-loss-of-a-child#ixzz6yv6yK6qD>*