



BelPres Church

Radical Love

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Hey, it's good to be with you. My name is Rich. I'm the pastor for Missions this morning, and actually for a while. And I want to welcome those of you who are worshipping online. It is really good to be with you this morning. You can take out your Bibles if you'd like, and read with me the scripture that we're going to be looking at. It is from Luke chapter eight. We're going to read verses 40 through 56. Hear God's word to us this morning.

Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. And then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house, because his only daughter, a girl of about 12, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him, and a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

Who touched me? Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you. But Jesus said, Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out for me. And then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. And in the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.

And while Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, a synagogue leader. Your daughter is dead, he said. Don't bother the teacher anymore. And hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, Don't be afraid. Just believe, and she will be healed.

When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. Stop wailing, Jesus said. She's not dead, but asleep. They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, My child, get up. Her spirit returned to her at once. She stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what happened.

Now, some of my favorite gifts are the ones that my kids made for me when they were young. Decorated soup cans to hold my pencils and my pens. Clay creations that are more clump of clay than anything easily recognizable. One of my favorites is a square ceramic tile coaster that I used to put my coffee on. And back in the day, in its early days, it had this bright, shiny, carefully painted picture on the top of it. But these days, that picture is worn off, and in its place are small cracks in the glaze on the tile and coffee stains.

But the note on the bottom says it all, because written with a black felt tip marker in five-year-old handwriting, it says, For dad, with love, Chels.

Now anyone else might clear off my desk and throw that stuff away, because to them, it probably looks like junk, right? But to me, man, those are treasures. They're all treasures, immeasurably invaluable. And that is why they stay on my desk.

Now we're all God's treasures. God loves us coffee stains, faded paint, faded paint and all. He loves us not because we're worthy or unworthy of his love. He loves us because that is who our God is. And it's his great love for us that makes us so immeasurably invaluable. So he never gives up on us, and he never lets us go.

And we're going through a sermon series about all the different ways Jesus has good news in our lives. Because when we experience the good news about Jesus personally, then we become equipped and able to share about him naturally with other people.

And in the passages that we just read, Jesus has arrived by boat, and he is immediately met by this synagogue ruler named Jairus. Synagogue rulers were appointed Jewish leaders in their community. They were in charge of maintaining the synagogue and in ordering all the services. Jairus was this important and influential person in his community. But no one would have expected what happened next.

Because Jairus comes and falls at Jesus' feet and begs him to come and heal his dying daughter. Now, it would have been shocking, because powerful people don't usually fall down and beg for help. And shocking, because religious leaders were critical of Jesus. And yet, here's Jairus begging for his help. Jairus is doing what any good father would do, and he knows that only Jesus can save her.

They are joined by a woman in the crowd who has this medical condition where she's been bleeding continually, and she's been bleeding continually for 12 years. She has no father, no mother. There are no friends by her side. She is unnamed in this passage. Her condition has made her known throughout her community as unclean. She is the unclean one because of Jewish purity laws. Now, she lives alone. She is in isolation. So she fights her way through this crowd, and seeing Jesus touches just the hem of his coat, and immediately she is healed.

Jesus noticing that power has gone out from him, he asks who touched him, and this unclean woman then comes, drops at his knees, at his feet, and describes everything that has happened to her. Now, some commentators say that Jesus asked her to come forward because he wanted her to testify in front of everybody else. But I think Jesus had more for her, a lot more, because Jesus gives her a new name. He calls her daughter.

No longer will she be called unclean. No longer will she be alone in an isolation. Jesus gives her a new beginning, makes her part of a new community, a new family, a new father. She belongs. She is beloved.

And as endearing as this image of Jairus willing to risk everything for his daughter is in this story, Luke is placing this image of an earthly father in contrast to the limitless love of our heavenly father. God is for those who suffer, for the lonely, for the outcast, the broken. And God is for the wealthy and the powerful. And God is for everyone that's in between those two. That is who God is. God loves everyone.

Now, where are you in this story? Who do you identify with? The bleeding woman, with Jairus, and his daughter? Or are you somewhere in between?

Now, when I read stories like this, I can't help but see just how much Jesus understood people, and the circumstances that they are in. Like Jesus was constantly, deeply moved with compassion for the people around him. Jesus feels every disappointment, every broken promise, every emotional wound you have received. All our doubts, our fears, our insecurities, our suffering, our pain, Jesus knows it all. He understands it all, because he sees us. He understands us. He has compassion for us.

So come to him, just as you are. Lay it all before him. He will. He will meet you where you live. And he will love you where you are. There is nothing that you have done or will ever do to make him love you less. And there is nothing you can do to make him love you more, because he already loves you as much as an infinite God can possibly love you.

Now, I once read about a teenage girl who ran away from home, and you may have heard this too. She took a bus to the city after she ran away, where she met a man who gave her something to eat and a place to stay. Well, one day, he gave her some pills that made her feel good. And one bad thing led to another bad thing, and eventually she began working for him as a prostitute. She rationalized it all, though she thought she lived in a penthouse and ordered room service whenever she wanted, so she had it made.

But then she got really sick, and the man she worked for kicked her out on the street. By this time, she had a bad drug habit. She was cold, lonely, feeling lost. One day, she just broke down sobbing uncontrollably. Well, she got on the phone and called her parents, but no one answered. So she left a message. She said, mom, dad, I was wondering about maybe coming home. I'm gonna catch a bus up your way, and it should get there about midnight tomorrow night. But if you're not there, well, I guess I'll just stay on the bus and keep going.

Well, the next day, she got on the bus, and when the bus got to her hometown, she really didn't know if anybody was gonna be there, or if they even cared. She got off the bus, walked into the terminal, and was blown away by what she saw, because there, standing in front of her, were 40 people wearing these crazy party hats and blowing these streamers. Her parents, brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles, even her grandmother showed up. Taped across the back wall behind her was this big sign that said, Welcome home. No judgment, just a lot of hugs and tears.

She did nothing to earn that. She did nothing to deserve that. But love like that doesn't care, because it's unconditional. And that is how God loves each of us. Just as you are, no matter what you have done, he is patient, and he loves to welcome his children home.

Whether we realize it or not, our culture often places constrictions and pressures us in ways that inhibit our ability to experience God's amazing love. Like some cultures hold grudges and force us never to forgive. Other cultures pressure us and require honor and loyalty to family and above all else. But whenever we surrender to Jesus Christ, his love melts away those constrictions and slowly sets us free.

And the only word I know in the English language to describe that kind of love is the word radical. God's love is radical love. And there are many characteristics about God's radical love, and if I were to go through them all, we'd be here till late tonight, and I'm not going to do that to you. So I just want to look at three, very Presbyterian, right? How amazing that I fell on three. But these are the three that I want to share with you. That God's love is universal. It's scandalous, and it's transformative.

So the first one is this. God's radical love is universal. God has no favorites. We're all his favorites.

Now, looking back at the story, Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman couldn't be any more different, right? Different social classes, economic status. But Luke ties them together in this story. Jairus' daughter is 12 years old, and this woman has been bleeding for 12 years, which means that her condition started about the time this girl was born. They both are desperately ill. They both need a savior. And Jesus heals them both.

As different as they are, he heals them both. God loves absolutely everyone everywhere on the face of this planet. Those who know they need it, those who don't think they do, those who aren't experiencing it, and those who have never ever had the opportunity to even hear about it.

John 3:16 says, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. Bel Pres, we can be the community who doesn't fail the unnamed suffering ones in our midst. We can be the community that shakes free from comfortable apathy and become more loving by being more loving. We can be the community who shares Jesus' love across cultures.

God's love isn't meant to be incubated, it's meant to be released to absolutely everyone everywhere. So let me ask you, who could you be overlooking or ignoring? And how can you show Jesus' love to them?

My first internship experience was working with drug and alcohol-addicted teens in a church outreach ministry. Mark was 18 when I met him, he was a big guy. He had been in and out of jail several times. His arrest record was really long. He'd blown every opportunity and ruined just about every relationship that could have helped him. And then one day in court, Mark was ordered to attend our program. The judge told him he could either go to church or go to jail for a really, really long time. Surprisingly, Mark chose church.

Well, for weeks, Mark said nothing. He just sat in his seat and glared, week after week. And then one night, Mark asked to share. He told us that he grew up in a really broken home. He was angry and he was filled with hate. But when he came to these meetings, he started to meet people who really cared about him for the first time in his life, people who cared about him. He learned about a God who loved him enough to pay the penalty for all of his sin and who promised to be with him always. He saw Jesus changing the lives of the other people in the group, and he wanted that for him.

So that night, we sat with Mark, and we prayed with him. He invited Jesus to be his Lord and his Savior. And that totally changed him. He joined the core leadership team. He was frequently the speaker at our meetings. He told anyone and everyone who would listen about Jesus and about what Jesus was doing in his life. God turned this big old guy into a huge loving teddy bear.

Well, I lost touch with him when I moved to Washington. One day, I got this letter in the mail. It was from Mark. He'd found my address. And I want to read some of that letter to you.

He writes this, I'm still clean and sober. God has changed my life. He's the most important thing in my life, for without him, I've got nothing. I rely on his grace and his faithfulness. I still have fears and insecurities, yet they're not as powerful. I find peace in knowing God loves me. People don't seem to put faith in God unless they have no other option to go to. Sad, but true. If anything will attract people to God, it will be his love and the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit. Keep me in your prayers, Mark.

Man, that made my day. It makes my day just reading of it again. You know, Mark didn't expect to experience God's love flooding into his life when he came to our ministry. He did nothing to deserve it. He didn't earn it. In fact, Mark had

done many things you could say made him undeserving of that kind of love display.

But the good news of the gospel means that God loves even the undeserving, which leads me to my next point, that God's radical love is scandalous. Like, it's so radical that it seems unfair, right? God gives everything to those you'd think have no right to expect it. And that's what the older brother complained to his father about as his father welcomed his younger brother home in the parable of the prodigal son. Our God is the God who leaves the 99 sheep in order to find the one who is lost. God offers his love to the deserving and the undeserving, but he never forces it on us. We have to receive it.

And when we reach out and we place our trust in him, like the woman did in this story, God gives us a new name, a new identity. No longer would we be known by the names that used to define us, names like ashamed, abandoned, unlovable, the one who won't amount to much. But when Jesus died on the cross, he took all of our sin, all of our shame, our brokenness, our wounds, he placed them on himself, and he paid the price for it all through his sacrifice on the cross.

And now, he gives us a new name, and our new name shall be beloved daughter, beloved son, child of the most high God, joyfulness, confidence, overcoming one, friend to all who don't know the Lord. What name is Jesus giving you in your life these days? God's radical love is universal. God has no favorites, we're all his favorites. And God's radical love is scandalous.

And third, God's radical love is transformative. See, God's love doesn't just comfort us and make us feel better. God's radical love becomes a constant force at work in us and for us. His love, it heals our shame, it melts away our sin, it gives us strength and courage to live into the new identity he gives us as the beloved of God. His love casts out fears, it reorders our affections, it helps us let go of old habits and destructive behaviors.

I think one of the most powerful moments in this passage happens at verse 54. At that point, Jairus' daughter is dead, Jesus has come, and he's told the people around him to stop crying, because the girl isn't dead, she's asleep. They laugh at him, which sets up verse 54 so nicely. But they laughed at him. But he took her by the hand, and he said, my child get up, and she does.

But is God's word. It's a defiant, nevertheless word. Whenever and whatever we are facing, it may look big and overwhelming, like the child is dead. But he took

her by the hand, and said, my child get up. But is a contrarian word. It is the constant effect of Jesus' radical love in our lives and around us in our world.

Now, one thing most of us do is that we tend to underestimate God. We limit God's power and the breadth of his radical love to change us, change our world. And what may seem like wishful thinking to us becomes glorious realities to God. And because God's radical love is working within us and for us, there is no obstacle that is too big for us to face.

Romans 8, 37 and 38 says, We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced, I love that, I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future or any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing is impossible with an all things are possible God. How's Jesus love shaping you this morning? Or reshaping you?

See, God's radical love is good news. It is the best news, really. And when we experience it, when it gets hold of our lives, we want to share that with other people. So evangelism isn't something that we need to be afraid of. It's what happens when we naturally live our lives, because we have a story to tell about how God's radical love has been shaping us and reshaping us. And we have a Savior to talk to them about.

So then some action steps this week. First, do this week's exercises in the journal. And if you don't have a journal, you can download one from our website or our church app.

Second, pay attention to the one. Jesus felt the smallest tug on his robe from this bleeding woman. It would have been easy to miss her. Everyone else did. Peter saw the crowds pushing up against Jesus. Jesus felt the one. So ask Jesus to help you see and pay attention to the one that nobody else sees. Who appears, maybe they are part of a different culture, or maybe they're the one who appears strong and confident. Ask questions, be curious. Your story might be the one they need to hear.

And then third, and this is a little more complicated, tell Jesus you want to make him your greatest passion. And that's true especially, especially if you're struggling with apathy or ambivalence this morning. Make Jesus your greatest passion. Get rid of anything and everything in your life that stands in the way of experiencing his great love, because there is more for you. More of his love,

more awareness of his presence at work in your life, a deeper, greater relationship with him. So spend time with him this week and ask him for more.

Now these days, my grandkids are the ones that make the gifts that are landing on my desk. And most recently, I received this tree. It took a little time to figure out what that was, but it's one of my treasures too. And I love it, like all the rest of them.

We are God's treasures, yes and amen. As misshapen or inadequate as we may feel, we are immeasurably invaluable to the one who made us. But here's the thing. If you love the one who makes the treasures, then you need to love all his treasures. Love God, love his treasures. His love never fails and never gives up and never runs away from you or from me or from anyone else.

So, Jesus, for the sake of the world, would you light the fire of your love in us? We lay it down before you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures)

- What do we learn about God's story in this passage?
- What do we learn about our story in this passage?

Talk:

- When have you felt out of place, and who made room for you in a way that helped you feel you belonged?
- Where do you currently feel confident and connected, and where do you feel overlooked or worn down?
- Who in your everyday life sits outside your usual circles and could use simple welcome or presence this week?

Action Plan:

Review the action prompt below, share any initial ideas of how you might pursue this practice this week.

- Who is already around you but not already close?
- Choose one normal space this week (break room, sideline, classroom, lobby, gym, coffee line). Make room for whoever is there with you by inviting them into your table or conversation, asking a real question and

waiting long enough to hear an honest answer, staying present longer than politeness requires, or sharing a bit of your own story. No fixing. No matching. No managing personalities. Just making room with Jesus' posture: Come sit. You matter here.

Closing Group Prayer:

Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement for the week ahead.