

Understanding Jesus

Letting Jesus Lead

Luke 8:40-56

Today we finish up our sermon series in Luke 7 and 8 we've entitled understanding Jesus. We hope it's been helpful for you. As you'll see in the "Focus" box in your bulletin, the next two Sunday and on Christmas Eve we're going to talk about "The Cost of Christmas." Hope you can join us for those messages and times of worship.

Introduction. My son and I have a running joke. People sometimes post on Facebook something to the effect of, "Three weeks from today I get to marry my best friend." Riley and I would like someone post, "Three weeks from today I get to marry my best friend's sister!" That would be the best of both worlds!

All that to say, last Sunday down in Dallas I think Riley married his best friend Ashley. Brenda and I have lots of great memories from the wedding weekend, but one of my favorites was the mother/son dance. I've got no dance moves; I had one move in high school, but it was very lame. But Brenda and Riley both have moves. A couple nights before the wedding they were practicing their mother/son dance at the AirBnB where we were staying. It was a swing dance routine. At one point Riley said, "Mom, let me lead." Apparently when you're swing dancing, one partner leads with all sorts of subtle moves and the other person follows. The result is a really cool, beautiful thing.

Today's passage basically tells us that when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, we need to "let him lead." We see in Luke 8:40–56 two intertwined accounts of **two desperate people** who needed Jesus to do something miraculous: one was Jarius whose twelve-year-old daughter was on the verge of death; the other was an unnamed woman who had a twelve-year-old medical condition that severely limited her life. As we'll see, they had to come to Jesus and interact with Jesus on his terms. They had to "let him lead."

Sooner or later, every single one of us will be desperate for Jesus to do something for us that we cannot do for ourselves. When you are desperate, it will be important for you to let Jesus lead. Instead of laying down your terms and telling Jesus what to do and how to do it, you will need to defer to him. Today's passage gives us great insight into how we can "let Jesus lead."

Let's notice how Jesus invited people to follow his lead in Luke 8:40-56. Luke sets the context in verse 40.

40 Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.

Jesus had returned from the other side of the Sea of Galilee and delivered the young man from demonic forces. Since Jesus' ability to heal people had become well-known, a crowd had gathered waiting for Jesus' return. One man in particular was desperate:

41 And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, 42 for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying. As Jesus went, the people pressed around him.

Jarius was a leader in the local synagogue (where Jewish people gathered weekly for worship), so he would have been known by virtually everyone in the crowd. He was desperate because "his only daughter" was at home dying. This term translated "only" is the same rare word that Luke used three times in his gospel. Each time it refers to an only child who had died or who was in danger of dying: in chapter 7 a widow's "only son" had died; here Jarius' only daughter was dying; in chapter 9 a man's only son was tormented by a demon (9:38-39). This is the same term used in John 3:16 used of Jesus, God's "only Son." In the Bible, whenever you come across an "only child" who is dead or in dire straits, God is about to do something significant or miraculous. [See also Hebrews 11:17-19.]

Jarius fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house. As we've seen throughout Luke 7 and 8, Jesus was very willing to go. As he went, "the people pressed around him." Jesus was being jostled by the crowd of people.

At this point the focus shifts from Jarius and his daughter to a woman who needed healing. Notice how Luke describes her:

43 And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone.

The Jewish Law stipulated that a woman in her condition was ceremonially unclean and therefore she would have lived her life largely in isolation from other people (see Leviticus 15:25-33). Luke mentions that her condition started twelve years earlier, and that she had exhausted her resources "on physicians" (like Luke himself; see Colossians 4:14). But "she could not be healed by anyone." For twelve years she had been living with the uncertainty of her medical condition. So Jesus was her last option.

Like Jarius, she was desperate. But unlike Jarius, she didn't fall down at Jesus' feet, because she didn't want to be noticed - perhaps to avoid the embarrassment of her medical condition or perhaps because she was technically breaking the Law by "rubbing shoulders" with others while she was ceremonially unclean.

44 She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased.

This sounds very superstitious to us - the idea that touching Jesus' garment would heal her. But we'll see later that this woman had legitimate faith in Jesus. Luke tells us that she was healed immediately.

45 And Jesus said, “Who was it that touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!”

Sometimes Jesus asked questions to which he knew the answer; and that may or may not have been the case here. But clearly, he wanted whoever had intentionally touched him to identify him/herself. But Luke records that “*all* denied it,” including the woman.

What happens next happened to Jesus repeatedly: *someone explained to Jesus why his words or actions were misguided or wrong*. It happened when he was twelve years old and he stayed in Jerusalem instead of going back to Nazareth with his parents, and it happened when he was thirty-three years old and he set his face to go to Jerusalem to be crucified. Here Peter is the one who explains to Jesus that the question, “Who was it that touched me?” was misguided.

Peter should have been thinking, “Since Jesus is brilliant and often knows things I don’t, I’m eager to see where he’s going with this question. . . *I’m going to let him lead.* . . .” Instead, Peter basically said, “Master, that’s not a very informed question because many people are touching.”

That’s the way we approach the words of Jesus sometimes. Jesus says something that’s counterintuitive or difficult to understand, and we dismiss it out of hand as unreasonable or unhealthy or unimportant. Instead, we should be fascinated by the hard sayings of Jesus, and we should be humble enough to assume that he knows more than we do.

46 But Jesus said, “Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.”

Jesus wasn’t merely asking who touched him physically; he was asking who experienced his healing power when they touched him. At that moment, the woman realized that she could no longer go unnoticed.

47 And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. 48 And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

Jesus calls her “Daughter,” signifying that he had a fatherly affection for her. It’s significant that Jesus makes clear to her that “[her] faith has made [her] well.” Jesus’ robe hadn’t healed this woman . . . thinking positive thoughts hadn’t healed this woman. When Jesus said, “Daughter, your faith has made you well,” he was saying that **God** had healed this woman in response to her faith. As we’ve seen several times in Luke 7 and 8, Jesus always responds to faith. He always responds when people are confident in Jesus himself.

Speaking of “daughter,” what has happened to Jarius’ daughter? The delay caused by the woman in the crowd must have been torturous to Jarius. In verse 49 we see that his worst fears were realized.

49 While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler’s house came and said, “Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more.”

Of course this news was devastating for Jarius; he had believed that Jesus could and would heal his daughter. The temptation would be for Jarius to give up hope that he would see his daughter alive again. But notice what Jesus tells Jarius.

50 But Jesus on hearing this answered him, “Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.”

Fear would be an understandable reaction for Jarius. But Jesus gives him (and us) another option: faith. “Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.” Jesus is telling Jarius to believe something incredible (i.e., not credible). Jarius had to believe and ***follow Jesus’ lead.***

51 And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child.

We aren’t told exactly why Jesus only allowed Peter, John, and James to enter with him and the child’s parents. On two other occasions Jesus allowed only these three disciples to accompany him: at the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:28ff) and in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified (Matthew 26:37).

In verse 52 Jesus addresses the mourners at Jarius’ house.

52 And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, “Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.”

As Jesus had told the widow at Nain (Luke 7:13), Jesus tells those gathered, “Do not weep,” adding “for she is not dead but sleeping.” As we’ll see, Jesus isn’t saying that she only appeared to be dead; he is saying that she will soon wake up from her death.

How did the crowd react? Would they be interested in knowing more about the cryptic statement he’d just made? “What does he mean by ‘sleeping’?” Would they let Jesus lead or not?

53 And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.

They ridiculed the idea that the girl would somehow just wake up as if she had been asleep. They had no interest in letting Jesus lead.

54 But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise." 55 And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat.

Once again Jesus comes into direct contact with someone/something that is unclean. When Jesus touches something, it never affects him; he affects it. When he touched the child's lifeless body, he didn't become defiled; it came back to life. Luke's comment is that "her spirit returned" - signifying that it had left her (i.e., she had actually died). When Jesus told them to give her something to eat that was probably a way to demonstrate that she was really alive.

56 And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

Last week we saw that Jesus told the man delivered from a legion of demons to **declare** what God had done for him. Here Jesus tells Jarius and his wife **not** to talk about what had happened. Jesus made similar prohibitions on other occasions. The best explanation for Jesus forbidding people to talk about his miracles, I think, is that when Jesus was in Jewish regions, he didn't want to feed misunderstandings about his mission as the Messiah, as if he were only a miracle worker and not the Suffering Servant who would die for the sins of the people.

Of course people would soon find out that Jarius' daughter was alive. But for their part, Jarius and his wife needed to let Jesus lead and not talk about it.

What does today's passage tell us about "letting Jesus lead"? If you want to let him lead, **Trust Jesus unconditionally**. Trust Jesus without conditions. This is true in our everyday discipleship (following Jesus); but this is especially true when we're desperate for Jesus to do something specific for us. That's when we tend to be the most intense and when we're tempted to take the lead and tell Jesus/God, "I will trust you **if** . . ."

Just to remind you where we see this in today's passage. . . The woman's preference was to be healed anonymously and without being noticed. Jarius' first choice was for Jesus to heal his daughter on her deathbed, not to let her die and then raise her from the dead. In both cases, when Jesus made it clear how he was leading, they believed and they followed unconditionally.

What does this mean practically when you're desperate for God to do something that you cannot do for yourself?

- * Maybe you have a life-threatening or life-altering medical condition - like the woman who touched Jesus' robe
- * Maybe you face circumstances that fill you with anxiety or fear - like Jarius, a family member who's in danger
- * Maybe a core relationship in your life that's disintegrated.
- * Perhaps you need freedom in some area of your life.

How do you trust Jesus unconditionally?

One of the core ways we trust Jesus is by praying. We pray for the the will of God as best we know it. We pray in faith. But we do so without ultimatums and without lecturing God. We pray for healing; but if God doesn't heal, we trust him anyway. We pray for reconciliation with others; but if the relationship is never restored, we trust God anyway. We pray for freedom in some area of our lives; but if it doesn't come as quickly as we want or in the manner that we want, we keep trusting God anyway.

I'm not talking about praying vague prayers so that we're never disappointed. I'm talking about praying bold, specific prayers in faith and in Jesus' name. . . but at the same time acknowledging that God often does things we don't understand, things that defy our logic. Some things will not be healed in this life.

We see examples of this throughout Scripture:

- * Job experienced catastrophic loss and had no clue why. Yet he declared, "Though [God] slay me, yet I will hope in him. . ." (Job 13:15)
- * The King threatened to throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace. Their reply, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to answer you. Our God is able to deliver us and **will** deliver us. . . but if he doesn't, we will never serve your gods or bow down to your image . . ." (Daniel 4:16-18)
- * Paul - prayed 3x for God to remove his thorn in flesh. God said, "No, I'm not taking it away; I'm giving you all the grace you need so that my power will be made perfect in your weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

They each let God lead by trusting him unconditionally.

Are you willing to be clueless or bewildered or disappointed? You will likely experience these things if you let Jesus lead.

One practice that reminds us that ***Jesus deserves and warrants our unconditional trust*** is the Lord's Table. When we celebrate the Lord's Table we remember that when we were the most desperate (being dead in our sin and enemies of God), Jesus died and rose again on our behalf. Through the bread and the cup we remember that his body was broken for us and his blood was shed for us. God sent only Son to die on the cross and be raised on the third day that whoever believes in him would have eternal life.

Paul wrote that when we remember Jesus in this way, we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). We look to the return of Jesus as the time when all wrongs are righted; those who believe in him will be raised with imperishable bodies and the sufferings of this world will fade and we will enjoy Jesus for eternity.

The promise of that Day reminds us that it's right to let Jesus lead by trusting him unconditionally. Take a few moments to begin a conversation with Jesus about letting him lead; you'll probably need to continue the conversation with him later. Perhaps you're desperate for him to do something for you (or someone you love). Talk with him about that.