

## **“The Rate of Exchange”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

June 27, 2021 – Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 5:21-43

If I were to ask you where you are located right now, you might respond in one of a few different ways. You might say that you are located in a pew, or in the sanctuary, or in the church; or you might say that you are smack dab in the middle of Stoneham, Massachusetts; or that you are just a few miles north of Boston; or that you are in Middlesex County; or that you are in New England or the United States of America. For those of us gathered in the sanctuary this morning, all of these would be true, as our bodies are all physically located together in these places. Those of you who are joining us online or by phone or TV (or who are reading the text of this sermon right now) may respond differently as your bodies may be located elsewhere, perhaps even on the other side of the globe. Another very different way you might respond is not by stating your geographic location, but your social location.

Your social location, which is unique for all of us, is your standing in society. This involves your geographic location, but also includes other aspects of your being, such as your race, age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, level of ability, relationship status, level of education, occupation, and religion. Some of these aspects of who you are have come to you by birth, some by the choices of your family, some by your own choices, and some by circumstance. Some have come your way simply by luck—that’s the way the cookie has crumbled.

Each of these different aspects of your being, when combined, gives you a unique place in society, with some aspects giving you a more elevated location than other people. If the goal of our lives is to rise to the highest social location, which offers one the most power or agency to do whatever one’s heart desires, some aspects of our being place us further ahead than others in achieving that goal. If we were to begin running a 400-yard-long race right now, with power or agency as the finish line, some of us would start, because of our social location, much further ahead than others. If you’re white, you get to start 100 yards ahead of others (one clear example of this advantage that you may have seen in the news

this week is that since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the average life expectancy in the United States has dropped by 1.4 years for white people, but by 3.3 years for African Americans and 3.9 years for Latinos). If you're a man, you get to move ahead even more. If you're straight, step a few more yards forward. Those of us who are protestant Christians still get to take a few more steps forward. When the race begins, we'll all be at different starting points, with some of us having the most advantage or privilege of a head start, while others of us will start further back in the pack. Some of us, by our social location, will be equipped with the best of running shoes; others of us will be running barefoot. Some of us will have the wind at our back; others of us will be carrying weights that slow us down. Such is the unfair race of life.

Consider the social locations of a couple of the different characters in today's scripture readings from the gospel of Mark. One of the characters is a man named Jairus, who is the leader of the synagogue where he lived. He was likely highly esteemed by others and had a lofty social location. Another of the characters is a woman who had a chronic illness that caused her to bleed. Her location was quite different from that of Jairus. In her society, she had much less agency just because she was a woman (notice, she doesn't even have a name). As human blood was quite taboo in the Jewish society of her day, there certainly would have been people who would have considered her, just because of her bleeding illness, to be ritually unclean and someone to be avoided. I imagine that some people, when seeing her walking towards them on the street, might turn and go another way or step as far as possible to the side just to avoid touching her and becoming unclean themselves.

Jesus had an encounter with both of these people, located at very different ends of the social spectrum, that brought both of them healing as they needed it. Jairus, the lofty leader of the synagogue who was brought low by the grave illness of his daughter, humbled himself by falling at the feet of Jesus, the healing carpenter from the rural backwater of Nazareth, but had his spirit lifted as Jesus lifted up the hand of his daughter and restored her to life and health. The unnamed, bleeding woman, who was already bowed down by life when she encountered Jesus, boldly reached out and touched his robe as he walked by and found herself healed immediately by the power of Jesus (and she also gained esteem by being named "daughter"). For both of these characters, the healing

power of Jesus came to them instantly, just as they were, and lifted both of them to loftier places, where they were able to experience wholeness and more agency in life.

The exchange of power from Jesus to these others was instant and it changed their lives instantly. We, as followers of the healer Jesus, being filled with God's empowering Spirit, also have the ability to use our power, wherever we are located, to lift up the lowly. The rate of our healing exchanges of power can be instant, they can be completely life-changing, and they can bring healing to our society.

Wherever you are located socially this morning, pay attention to whatever agency and power you do have, and use this for healing others, lifting people up, and restoring them to wholeness. Exchange some of your lifting power with the lowly by your giving of time, talent, and treasure. For this exchange of power is how the unjust cycle of privilege gets broken, the peaceful realm of God on earth grows, and the world we create for our little, newly-baptized sister Riley to be raised in is one that is more blessed, whole, and filled with God's grace. May we follow in the good path of Jesus, the power-exchanging healer, today and always. Amen.