

**Sermon Delivered by Rev. Hugh Reid**  
**July 8, 2018 – Lake Joseph Community Church**  
**“Taking a Chance on Love”**  
**Texts: Psalm 27; Mark 5: 21 - 43**

How do you hope again, when hope has run out? How do you risk love again, when your heart has been broken and emptied? Today we meet a woman who does that very thing. Today we meet a woman who courageously, vulnerably, takes a chance on love.

I was in Israel two years ago in the newly excavated village of Magdala, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The name Magdala might call to mind, the name of another courageous woman of the Gospels, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Magdala, it is thought that this was her home town.

There are many striking things to see there but one of them is not an ancient ruin but a modern architectural gem, a worship center called “Duc in Altum”. It takes its name from the story in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of Luke when after preaching to the crowds from a fishing boat, Jesus tells his followers “Duc in Altum” put out into deep water.

It is intended to be a place of prayer welcoming people of all faiths. When you pass through the entrance, you are in the women’s atrium, a large space embraced by 8 pillars; seven of them celebrate the presence and ministry of particular women in the story of Jesus. The 8<sup>th</sup> pillar represents “the women of all time who love God and live by faith.”

Through the Atrium you look into a worship space called “The Boat Chapel” that through a huge window opens out upon the blue waters of the Sea of Galilee.

But it is by a staircase that leads to a lower level beneath the atrium that you descend to what is called, “The Encounter Chapel”. It’s remarkable in a number of ways. First, its floor is actually the excavated flagstones of the original marketplace of Magdala. You are walking on the very stones on which Jesus likely walked and encountered fishermen and traders, men and women.

Second, the space is configured to echo the first century Synagogue being excavated nearby. A reminder of our Jewish roots and a space where Jews and Christians might learn to encounter each other anew.

But perhaps the most remarkable thing in that space is a large, mural sized painting which dominates the room. It is called “*Encounter*”, and it depicts a throng, a chaos, of men’s sandaled feet, soldiers, fishermen, and one pair at the bottom of a white robe and a prayer shawl. And there in the midst of all those toes and sandals in one frail, weathered hand, reaching out from a fraying sleeve, toward that white robe.

And you wonder, what possessed he to do that, the risk she took, and what a risk?

It was not so much a risk for Jairus. When we first encounter him, his title precedes his name: “one of the leaders of the synagogue”. We know him immediately as an important man in town, a man of substance, of prestige. Incredibly this important man falls at the feet of this Galilean rabbi, begging him, repeatedly, to heal his little daughter who hovered at the point of death. Jesus says nothing but follows him through the crowd. There’s a sense of urgency. The little daughter is about to die.

Then it happens. That courageous, desperate, risky touch.

You might wonder what this encounter on the shore of Galilee two thousand years ago has to do with us this fine July morning on the shores of Lake Joseph. Well, have you ever been disappointed; worn down, all the hope ripped out of you? Have you ever had your heart broken and the meaning of life emptied from you, so that you didn’t feel like going on? My home congregation has suffered the sudden death of a dearly loved man at 62 and we’re a little empty at the moment. Have you ever felt that way?

Then you know what this woman felt like. She had suffered, we are told, from hemorrhages for twelve years, twelve long years. This made her not only physically ill, weak, anemic; it made her religiously unclean and socially a pariah, an outcast. To touch her, her clothes, where she sat, where she slept, was to become unclean. She would have been shunned as a leper was shunned, as an AIDS patient was shunned. She could not become pregnant. She had lost her function and meaning as a woman of the time. She had spent everything she had on doctors and had only become worse, she was destitute, rejected, meaningless, drained of hope.

What did she see, what did she feel, what did she know in this Galilean rabbi that made her willing to take a chance on hope, one more time?

She was violating all kinds of taboos to get there. Indeed she was rendering everyone in the crowd she brushed against unclean. If they spotted her, they could have turned on her, beaten her. When Jairus approached Jesus publicly, openly, face to face, she has to sneak up, from behind. A weathered hand, in a fraying sleeve, reaching through a forest of feet, unawares.

But there was some kind of trust in her. A faith, a belief, an awareness that she was never intended to be alone, meaningless, rejected and so she took a chance on this love.

I wonder if that is why it was that he felt her touch. It couldn’t have simply been a physical thing. There was a crowd around him pushing in on him. Have you ever tried to get on a subway at rush hour?

He stopped and asked “who touched me?” His disciples thought he was crazy. “How can you say who touched me?” But he knew something more had happened. That someone did more than touch him. Someone had claimed the hope that he came to bring. Someone had realized the love that is the truth of our lives.

A clergy friend of mine, a woman reading this passage, pointed out to me, that Jesus stopped, not to heal the woman, she had been healed. He stopped to hear her story. In our time of “Metoo” and “TimesUP” we’ve come to know all those women’s stories that have not been heard or have not been believed or have been silenced. But Jesus stopped so that this nameless, status less woman could be heard.

She was terrified, but courageously, in fear and trembling, she fell at his feet as Jairus had and told him her story. He listened. Pronounced her whole and restored to life, and cured of her illness – two different things – and he did one thing more, he called her daughter. This nameless, rejected woman, had been given a new status, and eternal significance, as a daughter of God.

Then and only then the story that started this all, the healing of Jairus’ daughter, continued. This is a way of storytelling that Mark seemed to like. Five times in his gospel he takes a story and then sticks another story in its middle, it’s called an intercalation, but it’s technically known as a sandwich. Two stories that work as a whole, the filling interprets what wraps it and the wrap gives meaning to the filling.

Jairus reaches his home and he’s told his daughter is dead. She was twelve, deprived of her womanhood and full life at its very beginning. The woman who touched him had been ill for twelve years, twelve years deprived of her womanhood. Deprived of the gift of full life and creating life. But Jesus comes to give life and give it abundantly. When Jairus is told his daughter is dead, Jesus’ tells him what the courageous, reaching woman has just demonstrated: “Do not fear, only believe.” Which is better translated as: “Stop fearing. Start believing.”

Have you had your heart broken? Has hope left you? Stop fearing. Stop shrinking. Start believing. You are not meant to be alone, rejected, meaningless.

This past Friday we marked the 104<sup>th</sup> birthday of Viola Desmond. If you don’t know the name, she is the woman whose picture is going to be on the Canadian ten dollar bill later this year. She was born on July 6, 1914 but it was for a day in 1946 when she reached through all barriers of history, culture, and human cruelty and stupidity, claiming her true value, that we celebrate her story.

She was a school teacher but she was also an entrepreneur. She wanted to set up her own hairdressing business to cater to the unique needs of black women. The first hurdle was to learn the trade. Beauty schools in Halifax denied black women admission so she went to Montreal, New York and New Jersey to take courses. She set up Vi’s Studio of Beauty Culture in Halifax which served both as a business and cultural center. Then she established the Desmond *School* of Beauty Culture and trained women from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec to open their own businesses and employ other women. Then she marketed her own line of Vi’s Beauty Products.

It was on a business trip to Sydney Nova Scotia on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1946 that her car broke down in New Glasgow. While waiting for repairs she decided to take in a movie at the Roseland theatre.

Desmond paid for a ticket asking for a seat below near the screen, she was short sighted. The cashier gave her a ticket for the balcony. When she entered the theatre the usher told her, her ticket was for the balcony and she needed to go upstairs. Believing there had been a mistake, Desmond returned to the ticket window and asked to exchange her ticket. The cashier refused, saying, "I'm not permitted to sell downstairs tickets to you people."

As soon as she realized that she was being denied seating on the basis of race, Desmond walked back inside and took a seat downstairs. The theatre manager confronted her and when she refused to move, he called the police. She was forcibly ejected, arrested, charged and then convicted for failure to pay the extra penny in theatre tax required for the downstairs seat. She was charged with tax evasion. She spent the night in jail and paid a \$20 fine.

When she returned to Halifax her husband advised her to drop that matter but her church, Conwallis Street Baptist, and her minister, William Pearly Oliver, advised her to fight it. Her faith and her church inspired her to reach for the full dignity and humanity for which she and all God's daughters and sons were intended. She *never* won the court case but she began a movement, ten years before Rosa Parks, to reach out for life when a culture and blindness tried to keep her from it.

She died in 1965 at the age of 50 from a gastro-intestinal hemorrhage. She was pardoned 45 years later, in 2010, and in 2018 her image will appear on our \$10 bill.

Have you ever had your value and significance rejected? Have you ever run out of hope or had your heart broken and emptied? Stop fearing and start believing.

The one who has come to reach out to you, intends you for more. Stop fearing and start believing dear daughter and son of God. Start reaching and hoping again. Take a chance on the love with when you are loved. Your faith has made you well and there is a future for you.