

*2 Corinthians 8: 7-15*

*Mark 5: 21-43*

In October 2016, a video about making kombucha was uploaded to *Bon Appetit* magazine's YouTube channel. That video's host, Brad Leone - a tall, curly-haired, New Jersey-accented fermentation enthusiast and test kitchen manager at *Bon Appetit* - became a viral star, and the video spawned a wildly popular series known as "It's Alive." Four-and-a-half years later, the series is still going strong, and much of its success lies in Brad's casual, authentic, and "glass two-thirds-full" approach to cooking, fermentation, food, and life. In one memorable episode a year after the series began, Brad learned how to make sausage. Despite the implications of the common phrase, watching how sausage gets made was a fascinating process, both to Brad and to me as a viewer. It was surprisingly straightforward, and at one point, the man teaching Brad how to make the sausage said: "It's amazing you can eat a bad sausage when you see how easy it is [to make]." That phrase rattled around my head as I considered this week's text from the Gospel of Mark. The unnamed woman's faith is so great that Jesus doesn't have to do anything, and then Jesus tells Jairus simply to believe before raising the man's daughter from the dead. These stories present examples of easy, powerful faith, faith so straightforward that it's a wonder how anyone could mess it up, yet obviously, we do. We mess it up *all the time*. But I don't think these stories are about faith...at least, not entirely. I think these texts are about sausage, specifically about how the sausage gets made, so I'd like to propose a change to my sermon title, or perhaps the addition of a subtitle. I'll let you decide. Either way, I'd like to call what follows, "On the Making of Sausage."

We know very little about the characters in these stories. Jairus is simply described as a leader of the synagogue, and all we're told about his daughter is that she is twelve years old and near the point of death. We know a bit more about the unnamed woman suffering from hemorrhages: she's been suffering and bleeding for twelve years, she's spent all her money on doctors who haven't been able to heal her, and she is supremely confident that she will be healed if she can simply touch Jesus. Both Jairus and the woman have profound faith in Jesus, but where did this faith come from? The cheap, easy answer is that they had faith when they heard of him healing the Gerasene demoniac, or healing the man with the withered hand, or any of the countless healings Jesus performed earlier in his ministry. How could you not have faith in the healing power of Jesus when the healed are walking among you, whole and unblemished?! But think about their situations for a moment: a frantic father whose young daughter was at the point of death, and a bankrupt woman who had suffered unimaginably for twelve long years. Their faith arose from suffering, fear, sorrow, and desperation, and it professed a deep hope that their pain would end. As much as I wish it weren't true, I believe that faith is strengthened in adversity.

Allow me to pause for a moment to make something clear. I don't believe that we need to suffer or lead difficult lives to have faith in God - in fact, far from it - but we do need to remember that faith is first and foremost a gift from God. It's not something of our own creation, nor is it something that we can really control or exert our will against. Have you ever tried to have faith when you don't have faith, as if you could somehow force yourself into faith? It's a fruitless endeavor! Faith is a gift from God, but even though it's a gift, faith can be very abstract and hard to understand, and it's rarely easy for us to maintain and hold onto. Life becomes chaotic, or depressing, or unbearable, and we lose sight of our faith. One minute it's there, the next it's gone. It's natural to go through seasons of faith and doubt, especially in times of adversity, yet paradoxically, it is in those times of adversity that faith also has the potential to become something visceral and real, something that has the power to transform us and sustain us through our fears, through our doubts, through our suffering.

With that in mind, let's return to Jairus and the unnamed woman. They're both in the midst of profound tragedies, and yet their faith sustains them. How? As someone who struggles with their faith, I want to know how! Unfortunately, we just don't have the necessary context to understand exactly why their faith is so great. We haven't been made privy to how the sausage of their faith was made. We don't know how long they'd been working on perfecting their faith. We don't know how messy it got, or how many times they had to start over from scratch. We don't know about the times when they failed their faith, or the times when their faith failed them. We just have the finished product, glossy and perfect, waiting for us to pick it up and turn it over, debating whether or not to take it home with us. To be honest, that kind of faith is so unhelpful to me, because I want - I need - to see how the sausage was made. I need to see the large, rough chunks that are thrown into the grinder and gradually broken down into smaller and more manageable pieces. I need to see when and how you add specific ingredients that add flavor or help preserve the sausage. I need to make mistakes and ruin batches and learn from my failures. I need to see how it's stuffed into casings, and I need to learn how to repair a split casing if it happens. Most of all, I need to know how it's made so that I can teach others how to make their own sausage.

I know this may seem like a silly metaphor, and maybe it is, but when I reflect on my time here as a resident minister, I can't help but think about all the sausage we made together. You, First Presbyterian Church, are master sausage makers. You're not afraid to show others how the sausage gets made, and that's one of the main reasons I wanted to come do ministry with you. Do you remember the theme for Advent in 2018, the year before I arrived? It was *Draw Near*. In the midst of profound tragedy, you chose to continue working on yourselves and making sausage, and you invited people to draw near to the process. I knew I wanted to be part of a church that wasn't willing to let their wounds prevent them from making sausage. When I arrived less than a year later as one of six brand new staff members, you welcomed me and began teaching me your specific recipe. For a handful of glorious months, we were cranking out the sausage together, and it was good! I remember helping you craft your faith stories during officer training, visiting you in hospital and rehab rooms, trying to create a meaningful space for worship in a peak 1990s conference center, leading Bible studies on the music of the psalms, and packing the sanctuary on Christmas Eve as we sang praises accompanied by brass and candlelight and the warmth of the Spirit. I remember being ordained in this sanctuary, feeling your hands and hearts connected to mine as you prayed and sang over me, and I remember when the sausage-making stopped and the world shut down.

Talk about adversity. It's truly amazing to reflect on what we endured individually and collectively over the past year or so, and there are far too many things to name, but what's even more amazing to me is that we persevered. I was deeply depressed for much of the pandemic, and I questioned both my faith and my calling to ministry many different times. I know many of us suffered during the pandemic, but still, we kept making sausage. At times it may have felt like we were on autopilot, simply going through the motions, but other times we felt alive and hopeful. We stayed connected with drive thrus and Zoom rooms and communion kits, and we welcomed many new members during a time when most churches were losing members. Then, almost a year to the day when we last gathered in the sanctuary for worship, we opened our doors once again. And look at us today! We're here without masks, sharing smiles and songs and praising God with loud, joyful voices!

So what does all of this mean for us today, silly sausage metaphors and all? First, context matters. Who you are, what you've been through, and how you persevered matters, and it's your responsibility to share your context with others. We're baptizing a beautiful baby boy today, thanks be to God, and my charge to you is that you teach him how to make sausage. Equip him with all the tools and training he needs to make sausage for himself, to troubleshoot when things go awry, and to teach others when they want to learn how, but make sure you also teach him the context of your faith. Ground him in where he comes from and how this place and your unique brand of sausage were shaped by those saints who came before him.

Second, I see so many similarities between you and the bleeding woman, but not because you were bleeding when I arrived. You, First Presbyterian Church, are a vessel for the power of Jesus Christ. Your faith is so great that if you just reach out to touch the hem of his cloak, his power will rush into you. I've seen it happen firsthand, and I've been a recipient of your healing love. You are and will continue to be a force of love and generosity in this community, and your sausage will sustain countless people in need. You don't need anyone else to intercede on your behalf. Simply reach out, accept the gift that has been prepared for you, and go out into the world to share it with everyone you meet.

Finally, hear and believe this good news: your faith has made you well. Feel that healing in your body. Your faith has brought you through profound challenges and tragedies, and your faith will continue to sustain you in the years ahead. And now that you are well, ask what your faith can do for another. I don't know how Jairus and the woman had such great faith, but I doubt they arrived at such faith alone. We need one another for our faith to survive. We need one another for our faith to evolve. And we need one another for our faith to heal all wounds and transform sorrow into joy. Your faith has made you well. Your faith will continue to make you well. Go in peace, together, to love and serve and heal the world. Amen.

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