

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – 2024
Lamentations 3:22-33
2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15
Mark 5:21-43

Tenacity; tenacity is defined as the quality of being able to grip something firmly. Persistence, determination, doggedness; those are synonyms. Tenacity needs a setting in order to demonstrate itself. No one lounging by the pool sipping their strawberry daiquiri is said to be tenacious. Tenacity demonstrates itself in adversity. When a challenge is presented one has the opportunity to show oneself to be tenacious. Holding onto a bad idea is not tenacity; it's being stubborn, obtuse, headstrong. Tenacity is a virtue. We all know what quitting is like. Everyone here has a strength that is finite. Everyone here has flirted with the idea of quitting one thing or another. Not because it was wise to stop a particular pursuit but because you were tired of exerting the effort needed to continue. Fear of failure is another reason why people quit. Is faith tenacious? By its very nature, is faith tenacious?

To what do you aspire in regard to your faith? As a disciple of the crucified King, to what do you aspire? To love others as you have first been loved? To pursue humility, to pursue charity and wisdom and self-restraint? Do you aspire to honor Christ's name by considering others more significant than yourself, to forgive easily, to thoroughly digest His teaching, His life? I hope that you are aspiring to *something*. In our Rite of Confirmation and when we receive new members, this question is posed: "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" No one, in my presence, has ever said "no" to that question. Put tenacity in the front of your mind. Is it in you? Endurance in the face of difficulty, steadfast allegiance, trust that grips Christ irrespective of the situation – is Christ's church tenacious?

A woman is put before us today who is graceful, humble, discerning, faithful and tenacious. Who knows what she looked like or how old she was exactly but we do know that she faced adversity. St. Mark tells us all we need to know in two short verses. "And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:25-26). Twelve years; she likely suffered from a perpetual uterine hemorrhage or some other gynecological problem. Twelve years! This discharge of blood rendered her unclean under the Law of Moses and she would have been marginalized from the worship life of Israel (Leviticus 15:25-33). Ostracized; twelve years! She suffered much under the care of many physicians. If the barbaric practice of using leeches continued as late as the 19th century, imagine what misbegotten techniques were endorsed in the first century. How much blame was heaped on her by physicians who may have thought that her ailment was a divine judgment against her? What experimentation was she subjected to? Twelve years! How many nights did this woman cry herself to sleep? The cycle of anger, grief, feeling forsaken, hope when a new physician took her case, despondency when they failed, and wasting her resources on fruitless medical care – twelve years of this anguish!

This is how Psalm 13 begins: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1). This woman had a plan. Tenacity mingled with

humility and hope; this woman had a plan. She's trying to go unnoticed because she believes that she's not worth noticing. Where might *that* have come from? This woman had a plan. In her cloudy sense of futility she still had hope and faith and the divine strength that inhabits a heart that knows God's grace. Her plan centered on the reports she had heard about Jesus. Any seemingly inconsequential engagement with this man would reap a powerful benefit. Tenacity and hope; "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well" (Mark 5:28). Her plan had merit. Her hope was well placed. This is how Psalm 13 ends: "But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me" (Psalm 13:5-6).

What difficulty plagues your days? Have you had to endure a cross that God has placed on you? Have you flirted with quitting? Another Psalm has this line: "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5). Jairus received a dagger to the heart. "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" (Mark 5:35). It was a message of grim finality: Everyone has to bend the knee at the tyrannical throne of death. The love of a father for his daughter; the promise of a life about to bloom fully and then abruptly ended; weeping would be the outward sign of a broken-hearted man. Weeping would remain for more than a night. Joy? Joy would be swallowed up in loss. And the Lord Christ was there. With His love, with His determination, His resolve to defend life, Christ was there, with Jairus. Jesus understood the logic of the messenger but He does not submit to it. "Do not fear, only believe" (Mark 5:36). Have you heard the Lord say this? Have you *felt* the Lord say this? Has that tender word, that bracing and tenacious word ever come to your heart, your mind? "Do not fear, only believe." It's not so much a command, as though Jairus had to find the will to comply with what Jesus was demanding. The Lord Christ breathes trust into the fainthearted.

Jairus and the woman with the flow of blood were desperate. Death and a cruel malady, a cruel, unrelenting malady, will make one desperate. What do we suffer? Doesn't our culture suffer much at the hands of many sociological quacks? Aren't false remedies laden on the shelves of our bookstores, our websites, our TV screens? People are desperate. The fields are white for the harvest (John 4:35). And the Lord Christ stands at the door and knocks (Revelation 3:20). And the Lord Christ is among us as One who serves (Luke 22:27). And we preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). If I just touch the hem of His garment. It was a plan with merit. Why? Because this is the eternal Son of God she reaches for. He put on the garment of our humanity – conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. That tenacious woman reaches out for the Word made flesh. The flow of blood; hers dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease (Mark 5:29). On the holy cross there was a flow of blood. Salvation comes from that flow of blood. The incarnate Son of God sacrificed Himself unreservedly for all of us desperate sinners. All disease and death was put on Him and He suffered it. Tenacious to lay claim to humanity, Jesus died bearing our sin. The blood of God dried on His corpse. That is the reality behind these words: "Do not fear, only believe."

Jesus took Peter, James, and John into Jairus' house. A miracle, an epiphany; it is as though the Last Day comes barging into that little girl's body. "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41). Weeping may tarry for a night, but joy comes with the morning. Isn't that an Easter verse? Isn't that what this life is all about? Easter is most certainly what this life is about. Christ is risen and death has no sting. Peter, James, and John saw it. We can be tenacious in our faith because

Easter governs all things. Whatever cross you bear is temporary. It is an absolute certainty that God does not forget His people. Christ's cross is proof. The empty tomb is proof. We will not bend the knee to the grave, or morticians, or cemeteries, or death – their tyrannical rule is collapsed in Easter's light. We have a plan. Like the tenacious woman, we have a plan. If I can just eat His body. If I can just drink His blood. If I can just be washed in His righteousness, receive His absolution, I will have forgiveness, life, salvation. It's not really our plan; it's His. Christ's plan has merit. That plan is all around you. He is all around you. May we, with a God-breathed faith, hold fast to Him with a tenacity that is holy, humble, and strong.