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The other day my husband and I went to Bethel to the Woodstock museum. While we strolled through the self-guided tour, we took in Wavy Gravy's multi-colored bus, the civil rights section, and the part of the tour that had actual sound bites of participants of the 23-day arts festival we call Woodstock. The local people seemed to see this vast sea of humanity coming into their little town in two ways. Either they saw them as strange, unclean Hippie trouble makers or they almost pitied them, sending food up to "those kids on the mountain" or helping them find their way to and from route 17.

Woodstock was an experiment in social change and peaceful activism. So here it is the 40th anniversary and what has changed? Well, looking at some of the kids that graduated this year, I'd say fashion has come full circle. The actual grounds at Bethel have been kept lush and green, a blessed sight for this tree hugger. So what has changed besides the price of a concert ticket?

In today's Gospel, Jesus, our rock star, has come into town greeted by his fans. It is a mixed crowd of town officials, shopkeepers, servants and the first century's own version of hippies. Amid this crush of people, a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years has such faith that she knows all she has to do is touch the hem of Jesus' garment and she will be healed. This woman would've been looked on as unclean in Jewish society. She had spent all her money on doctors who have not helped. Jesus is her last chance. And how often do we do the same thing; wait until things are really bad, then say, oh yeah! God...HELP!

In recent years, televangelists have flooded the airwaves with fear-based rants about how God was angry with the United States, how we need to return to our values. Well, in Jesus' time, the morals Jesus would have been raised with, made this woman an outcast through no fault of her own. If we were in that crowd of believers on that day, society would have us shun that woman the way today shuns the addict, prisoner, and the poor.

We fear what we do not understand, what we cannot control. Here, in this church, we are all believers who say we will not make our moral decisions based on fear of lack of understanding. We have learned in this community that Jesus' life blurs the edges and tells us to ignore the safety of where there are shades of gray. No one is invulnerable to the fear that comes with taking chances. That's what keeps most of us on the ground while George Herbert Walker Bush was jumping out of an airplane on his 85th birthday a few weeks ago. Airplanes, aside, what is holding us back from welcoming the stranger in our neighborhood or right here in church? What holds us back from volunteering for the food pantry or visiting the women in prison with Linda? What does it take from us except time? What did it take from Jesus to heal the woman who touched his cloak? It took nothing but awareness. He was aware that she touched him. In return, she was healed. Jesus became aware of suffering, and things got better. If we became aware of the suffering around us, what could we heal? If we ignore it because of fear, what kind of people do we devolve into? Writer/poet Marianne Williamson wrote this about fear and God.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.”

Fear is imagining the future and Jesus doesn't live there. He is our present. Reliving the sins of the past or fretting over what MAY happen is not being aware of Christ's presence. Our future is never the same as God's plan for us. Our past is baggage that weights us down as we struggle to keep up with God and the awesome life he has put before us. ***Put down the baggage and step away from the sins!*** “But”, you may say, “God wants us to repent” Yes I believe he does. And when we do we are fully forgiven. That junk has been laid at the foot of the cross, and we do not have to pick it up again. The problem here is God's love is so complete, so all encompassing, that we have nothing to compare it to. We cannot believe that with all the stuff we've done, God would love us anyway. So I want you to do something right now. Think of your children, grandchildren, a niece or nephew, any young person who means the world to you. Now, think about the worst thing that they could do. Do you love them any less? Could you inflict an eternity of punishment on them if they turned to you with a sincere heart and asked for forgiveness? Imagine their eyes; are they full of fear and worry? Feel how your heart breaks for them, how much you want to comfort them in that fear, take it away, envelope them in love and tell them everything will work out for the best. If you can feel that compassion, that love, how much more is possible from the creator of the universe?

What seems to happen when we don't feel worthy is we lose our trust. We cannot fathom that God in her infinite wisdom, will pour forth blessings on one such as us. We have no right to such gifts. And you know what? You're right. We don't have any rights. Rights are the high ground we stand on so that we don't have to work on our relationship with God. Jesus didn't hold on to any rights when he went to the cross. He gave up everything to live in his communion with God. In giving up everything, even his life, he shows us how to live in the abundance of God. Following Jesus, we can overcome the power of our belief that we are not worthy. We can overcome the belief in scarcity.

In the second reading, Paul is talking to the church in Corinth. It's basically a stewardship letter. He is asking for money to help the church in Jerusalem. Corinth is an established church, although it is in some rough shape. Paul uses a phrase from Exodus to reaffirm them in their ability to be generous and promises a balance. No one will be in want because of a giving heart. Both of our New Testament lessons today confirm a God who is abundant. With just the awareness that he has been touched, Jesus can heal a woman suffering for 12 years. With just a few words in Aramaic, he can raise a little girl from the dead. And with a generous heart the Corinthians can share in the body of Christ sacrificed. Things haven't changed. Our awareness can change the world or at least our own little corner of it. Our words can bring comfort and healing if we allow God to speak through us. We all share in the body of Christ in Eucharist. We can put down the big bag of fear that befuddles us and weighs us down. Think of it like healthy eating. We know that baby carrots are a heck of a lot healthier than Doritos, but we could rationalize that since

they're both orange we'll take the Doritos. God offers us so much more than that junk. We can kid ourselves all we want, but we know the right thing to do is let Christ into our lives and be dependent on him for all our needs. If we do that we will be provided for. Yes, it's a leap of faith. Yes, the world tells us that we have to watch out for ourselves. But it's that fear of scarcity itself that led us into the mess we're in. Its fear of not coming out on top that makes us hoard instead of share. Looking at the lessons this morning tells us something different than our televisions have been spewing at us for a long time now. Our lessons tell us that those who are healed, aren't those who believe in scarcity and try to take over or monopolize the resources we are given. It is in the hands of those who trust in God's abundance. It was in the faith of Jairus who pleaded with Jesus to come and visit his dying daughter. It was in the second woman who had nothing else to lose. It's in a flourishing congregation in Corinth or right here in Milford where we believe that God gives us all we need. Our creator is so abundantly generous, we have enough to share. So we share; our faith, our experience, our love, our food at the Eucharistic table. Yup, once we realize that Jesus is the bread of life we can stop eating junk food.

Amen+