You know those people who are cool, calm, and collected in the face of total chaos? You know, those people who you want to have as first responders to disasters, Who can remember how to put one foot in front of the other when everything falls apart?

Jesus is that kind of person –
The person you want to be near to figure things out, And to put things back together.

Jesus was known for this quality in his days on earth. In fact it’s exactly what drew the crowds to him in our completely chaotic Gospel reading. Crowds of people had heard of Jesus’ work, About his abilities to not only stay calm under pressure, But to perform miracles under pressure: Healing people, Calming wind and halting rain. Yes, this man Jesus is not intimidated by disaster.

This quality in Jesus is what drew both rich and poor to him in our Gospel for today. Jairus, a leader in his faith community, and a man of wealth, Desperate as he tried to help bring his 12-year-old daughter back to health. And the unnamed woman, Already cast to the fringes of society by her gender, Was pushed even farther into the margins by her illness, Hemorrhaging for 12 years with no relief.

And not just these two people, But also the hundreds who gathered in the crowd that day. Unnamed people with unknown stories, Seeking peace from this leader, Jesus. Seeking their own kind of healing.

Our situations may be different, But we’re no strangers to chaos ourselves.

I’ve existed in a holy kind of chaos all week. Last Sunday I began my position as your Assistant Rector, A day I’ve looked forward to for some time. And then this past Wednesday my husband Joe and I moved into our new home in Shaker. There was a joyful and chaotic holiness that permeated the week as I searched for light switches, learned names, and unpacked boxes. And while it’s been a wonderful beginning to our time in Cleveland,
It, like all transitions, has been chaotic.

It’s not just the characters in the Gospel or me…
Because I’m sure you’ve also felt chaos too.
It comes in all sorts of experiences and shapes and forms.
The chaos of organizing our kid’s summer schedules,
Of retirement,
Of renovating our homes,
Or starting a business.
The chaos in our news cycle.
The chaos of getting married,
Or finalizing a divorce,
The chaos of new birth,
And of death.

Chaos.

All of it.

So there’s something in these stories of commotion and confusion,
and Jesus’ command of it, that draws us in.
We’re drawn in,
Because we’ve known chaos,
And we’ve ached for healing and order ourselves.
We’re drawn in,
Because we find ourselves wondering with just a glimmer of hope:
“Maybe God will heal me too?”
“Maybe God will set things right and calm the storms in my life?”
But there’s a troubling risk in hearing these stories today.
There’s a risk because we hear that Jesus healed the women in the Gospel,
But he doesn’t always heal us.

There’s a risk, because we begin to think…quite fairly…that God is some kind of magician who
swoops in to set everything right for us,
just when we ask.

There’s a risk…
Because some among us have desperately sought Jesus like Jairus did,
Asking him through prayer to heal our beloved family member,
And the family member has died anyway.

This is the risk of stories such as these,
Readings that tell of chaos turned into sudden calm,
Of healings performed,
And pain lifted.
It’s a risk, because we can begin to think God doesn’t care about us any our sorrow. And sometimes, we don’t lose faith in God, But we lose faith in ourselves… Wondering if perhaps we’ve done something to deserve it, Or we’re just not asking in the right way.

This is the risk of these Gospel stories.

I thought of these risks all week, I thought of the unanswered prayers of so many people. The cries of people who weren’t lucky to live in the kind of chaos I got to live in this week – A chaos that included the generosity of a new community, And the potential of a new home.

There’s a cavernous chaos that surrounds so many… The chaos of those who grieve. The chaos of those searching for work, Seeking justice, Struggling with illness.

So perhaps then, I wondered, Perhaps we’re asking the less helpful question when we ask why Jesus won’t heal our illness, Or calm our chaos. Or bring our children back to life?

There’s got to be another way to interpret these kinds of stories, Because I don’t believe in a cruel God who doesn’t hear our prayers, Or feel our pain. That’s just not the God we learn about in Scripture or know: Jesus has never stood on the sidelines when we needed him, He’s never shied away from chaos. Jesus has shown that he’s present… So present that he was willing to die for us.

So perhaps it becomes less of a question of God’s loyalty to our specific requests… And more of a realization that what Jesus has promised to never abandon us. Jesus doesn’t promise to answer every prayer just as we’ve dictated it, Even if that’s what really think should happen, But he does promise to be with us through whatever comes.

Jesus promises to be present in the chaos, sitting at the bedside, Standing among the crowds in the street. Jesus doesn’t promise to heal all of our wounds, But he promises he won’t leave us alone in our struggles.
I thought of this when I recently read a memoir written by Kate Bowler. She’s a 35-year-old woman. And in the past few years, She was hired for a tenure-track position at Duke Divinity School. Just around that time she and her husband had their first child. And just after that, she was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Talk about chaos.

In the midst of all of this, Kate Bowler wrote a memoir called “Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved.” It was through her writing that she grappled with her questions about God – Questioning God’s loyalty and God’s plan… Reflecting on God’s presence.

And there’s a quote I want to share with you from her book. She wrote:

“At a time when I should have felt abandoned by God,
I was not reduced to ashes.
I felt like I was floating,
Floating on the love and prayers of all those who hummed around me like worker bees,
Bringing notes and flowers and warm socks and quilts embroidered with words of encouragement.
They came in like priests and mirrored back to me the face of Jesus.
When they sat beside me,
My hand in their hands,
My own suffering began to feel like it had revealed to me the suffering of others,
A world of those who, like me,
Are stumbling in the debris of dreams they thought they were entitled to,
And plans they didn’t realize they had made.”

Kate’s life was leveled to the ground with the news of her illness, And yet, among the ashes, she witnessed God’s presence still with her.

God hasn’t offered Kate a full recovery and healing, But as Kate wrote in her book, God has demonstrated God’s presence throughout her entire experience. God has not abandoned her. In fact, God was very near, Showing up in the faces of people, And their offerings of love.

So how do we process these intertwined stories of pain and healing? How can we relate as we ourselves head into a hot holiday week?

1 Bowler, Kate. Everything Happens for A Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved. Page 121.
In some ways,
I think we all begin to realize,
That to live is to exist in chaos.
No amount of good planning,
Or education,
Or support,
Or hope,
Can guard us from this reality…

We age.
We move.
We birth children.
We bury loved ones.
We take risks.
We die.

God doesn’t promise particular outcomes in our life on earth.
But what God does promise,
Is that in the midst of this chaos,
Jesus will set up camp among us.

Because there Jesus is, even now,
Standing in the boat on the stormy sea,
Kneeling at the bedside of a dying child,
Embracing an outcast woman, naming her as daughter.

There He is –
Standing with us through all of life,
Calling us deeper and deeper into the chaos that is a life of faith,
Following in His name. AMEN.