

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Hope can be heartbreaking, but Christ never disappoints, Egyptian theologian reminds Assembly

June 19, 2014



The Assembly choir sings during the Thursday morning worship service at the 221st General Assembly (2014) of the PC(USA) in Detroit, MI on Thursday, June 19, 2014. —*Michael Whitman*

General Assembly News

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With the words "blood is a sign that something serious is at stake," Egyptian theologian Anne Zaki grabbed the attention of the 221st General Assembly (2014) during Thursday's daily worship.

"Blood is a sign that something serious is at stake," she said, both for the hemorrhaging woman healed just by touching Jesus' clothing and, of course, later at the cross of Christ himself.

Zaki, an assistant professor at the Theology Seminary in Cairo, used the Mark 5:24-34 text of the hemorrhaging woman to expand on the surrounding story – that of Jairus and his daughter: Jairus might not have been bold enough to seek healing for his daughter had he not just seen Jesus heal the unnamed woman of her 12 years of bleeding, she said.

Zaki said she's surprised that according to the fifth chapter of Mark, Jesus asked the crowd, "Who touched me?"

"Why would Jesus expose a woman like that? Their judgmental looks must have pierced her," she said. "A Middle Eastern woman talking publicly about being unclean? This is a real stretch for this woman. Trust me, I know," she assured the congregation.

Once the woman is healed and Jairus learns his daughter is not dead after all, they both "once again experienced the divine intimacy of God," she said. When God's healing touch restores us, "we put a deposit of faith in other people's lives."

Jesus is "our crucified, bleeding God," but he's "also our resurrected God who brought forth hope in the most hopeless situation, so that we would always remember that love is the something that's at stake," she said.

Zaki also offered this warning: As powerful as hope is, it does have limits.

"On this Earth, hope can break your heart," she said. "We have all had our hopes shattered and died."

When hope is shattered, God offers us two promises, she said: Sin and death do not have the final word, and God is with us. "He will be there in the doctor's office, in the funeral home and in the darkness of the depression."

"Whatever you are facing, do not give up on God," Zaki said. "Hope in Christ never disappoints."

As they have throughout the Assembly, music leaders Bruce Snyder and James Biery – and the GA choir – rocked the house with anthems. This service featured two – "Praise His Holy Name" by Keith Hampton and "One Faith, One Hope, One Lord" by Craig Courtney.

As at every GA worship service, attendees took communion by intinction. Dozens of volunteers fanned out

throughout the hall to help worshipers celebrate the Lord's Supper together.