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“Be Made Well”

Mark 5:21-43

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²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²²Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.”

²⁴So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.

²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” ²⁹Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” ³¹And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³²He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

³⁴He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

³⁵While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” ³⁷He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.”

⁴⁰And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and said



to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!”⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Sermon:

“It’s hopeless,” they told him. “We know that you love your daughter, but we’ve tried everything we know. There is nothing we can do. She will not recover from this. She will not be made well.”

“It’s hopeless,” they told her. “We know that you’ve paid us your entire life savings, but we’ve tried everything we know. There is nothing we can do. The bleeding will never stop. You will not be made well. It’s hopeless.”

You’ve heard those words before: It’s hopeless.

They’re uttered in doctor’s offices, sports fields, classrooms, workplaces, living rooms, sanctuaries, public spaces, all over this world.

Our kickball team’s chances of winning a game this summer. Hopeless.

This divide between left and right. Hopeless.

This exhausting façade of a marriage. Hopeless.

My disappointing relationship with my mother sister father brother neighbor friend. Hopeless.

My physical health, my chance at being forgiven, my future prospects. Hopeless.

They tell you that there’s many things in this world to be afraid of. Natural disasters, angry people with guns, loss of privacy, systems of oppression, acts of true evil. But that’s not what I’m afraid of.

It’s hopelessness that I’m afraid of. Without hope, the only things we can see, the only things we can believe in are the things that are right in front of us. The only possible realities we can imagine are the ones we can make from what we know we already have. When hope dies, so does action, because we can’t possibly imagine a world in which our actions might mean something. When hope dies, so does generosity, because we can’t possibly imagine that there might be enough to go around. When hope dies, so does decency, because we can’t possibly imagine that there’s enough room left at the table for anyone but ourselves.

The thing about Jesus, though, is that he’s always working just a little bit outside the bounds of our imagination, always pushing the limits of possibility, always expanding the circle of family just a little bit wider, always giving us reason to hope. To hope that somehow, in the work and power of Jesus, all of our broken pieces, yours and theirs and mine, might be made well.

Mark invites us to consider this kind of hope in our passage today, this twofold story of desperation and faith and healing.

From Jairus’s perspective, there’s really only one story: the story of how Jesus is *going* to make his daughter well. For Jairus, the whole story begins and ends with his child.

But that’s not the only story that’s happening here. Inserted into the middle of this desperate



attempt to save a child's life is a story about another woman: poor, friendless, bleeding, longing for the kind of healing that only Jesus can bring her.

Mark tells these two stories this way on purpose. Reading these stories together, on top of each other, one interrupting the other, tells us something about how to interpret them. The story about the healing of a little girl would be powerful in and of itself, but that healing story is not meant to stand alone. The two stories are tied together.

The similarities are striking. Both are stories about women, unnamed women, women who are in great need of healing. Both women are ritually unclean, either because of death or because of menstruation. The young girl is twelve years old, the exact amount of years the elder woman has suffered from her hemorrhaging. Both healings are instigated by the faith and action of a desperate person. Both healings stand in the face of the best science of the day.

But they're not the same. The young girl, she has an advocate, her father Jairus, who has a position of honor in society, a house big enough to have more than one room, which means he has money, and the authority to approach Jesus on her behalf.

The elder woman has nothing. No money. No status. No one on her side. All she has left is this one wild idea, this one wild hope: she imagines that, perhaps, if she can touch the cloak of Jesus, she might be made well. She reaches out her hand and Jesus stops in his tracks to find her.

I can just see Jairus, standing there in the crowd, furious. His foot is tapping incessantly, his face is starting to turn purple, he's about to rip his own hair out of his head because on the way to rescue his child, Jesus, for some unexplainable reason, has taken a break. To talk to a woman. A woman about whom no one else would think twice. And all the while his precious little girl might at any second take her last breath. If I were Jairus, I'd be dragging Jesus to my daughter's bedside by his cloak. Who cares that Jesus can make this other woman well? I got there first and my child is about to die!

In the moment it feels like a dichotomy. It's the girl or the woman. If there's only so much of Jesus' time and power to go around, which person will Jesus choose to heal?

But these stories are tied together. The healing of the one woman is tangled up with the healing of the other.

This past week, I was at the beach with my family. My grandmother, saint that she is, brought a bag full of black raspberries, because she knows that what we love most in the world is when she and my mom make a black raspberry pie. It came out of the oven like a dream. It was beautiful, smelled like heaven. The first day, we all cut ourselves giant slices and ate to our hearts' content. But the second day, when there was really only one full slice left, that's when we started eying each other, trying to figure out who was going to make a play for the last piece. You can only cut a piece of pie up into so many slivers. At some point, somebody is going to miss out.

And more often than not, that's how we think about the world – like it's a pie. Like there is only so much left, so we need to jockey for position so that *we* aren't the ones who end up with an empty plate. So that it's not *our* stomachs that are hungry. So that it's not *our* children who don't have health insurance. So that it's not *our* lives that get derailed by somebody else's dreams.

And I get it. We live in a finite world, with limited resources, so if we're being *practical* we have to think about the world this way. It's all we can imagine.



But how powerful is our God? How powerful do we believe our God is? How powerful do we hope our God is?

When we live as people without hope, the only question we have time for is: Is *my* child well? We become consumed with defending our own well-being. Hopelessness and selfishness go hand in hand.

But when we live as people with hope, an endless world of possible questions opens up to us. We now have room to wonder not just, is my child well? But also: Is yours? Are you? And if not, what can I do about it? Because we trust that God's power is not finite like a piece of pie. God's power is not a limited resource.

No, as Christians we have hope that God can do things beyond what we can see, beyond what we imagine. Because we believe that our God can take dirt and turn it into a living breathing masterpiece, that God can feed thousands out of one small meal of loaves and fish, that God can rain down bread from heaven if need be, that God makes room for everyone and there is enough of God's love and justice to go around so we can have hope that in Jesus all shall be well, that all manner of thing shall be well.

When we have hope, we begin to see that our own personal healing is not and will never be separate from the healing of others, the healing of our friends, yes, the healing of our enemies, even, and most importantly, the healing of our brothers and sisters who have been forgotten and oppressed.

And, because we have hope, we don't get to ask for Jesus to heal us without assuming that he's going to heal the whole rest of the world right along with us.

Because we have hope, we don't pray for our friends without also praying for our enemies. We don't pray for our country without also praying for the world.

We don't pray for the wellbeing of Christians across the globe without also praying for the wellbeing of atheists, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews.

We don't pray for our children without also praying with all our might for the immigrant children who are currently still separated from their parents.

Because here's the thing about the love of Jesus: the love of Jesus doesn't know borders.

The love of Jesus doesn't care about who got in line first, or who is right.

The love of Jesus doesn't care about who deserves it.

The love of Jesus does not leave anyone behind, even if that means we take forever to get where we're trying to go.

We waste our life and energy worrying that there won't be enough, fighting for a seat, fighting for that last piece of pie, when all along, our God is just sitting there at the table with an endless supply of chairs and plenty of good food to go around.

As Jesus comes to the end of his dialogue with the formerly hemorrhaging woman, Jairus's friends arrive, with the worst possible news. "She's dead," they say. "It's over," they say. "It's hopeless," they say.

Jairus begins to shake, with anger, with grief.

But Jesus looks Jairus straight in the eye. Don't be afraid, he says. Just trust me. Dare to imagine for a moment that I might be even more powerful than you understood.



And Jairus does.

Before the story ends, his little girl is up and walking, ready for dinner like it's any other day.

And somewhere that evening, an unnamed woman sits by the sea, full of hope at the possibility of a future worth living, full of hope in our God, who is generous beyond imagination, whose steadfast love endures forever, who makes room for everyone at the table, who has the power to make all things well. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

