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“Life Restored”

Mark 5:21-43

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Introduction

One of Mark’s favorite writing styles is to place two stories sandwiched together—meaning, one story begins, another story interrupts it, and then the first story continues. So, we have the bread, the meat or the jam, and the bread again—sandwiched. Our story from Mark 5 fits that sandwiched style to a tee. We have the story of a little girl and a father who comes to Jesus for help, a woman whose situation causes Jesus to stop and interrupt the story of the first encounter, and then we pick back up that story from the start. See if you can note the flow as we look together at Mark 5:21-43.

Mark 5:21-43

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³ and 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.’ ²⁴ So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, ‘If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.’ ²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ Immediately 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 round 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.'

³⁵ While 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!' ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Sermon

I led a Bible study on our passage this past Thursday. I asked the women gathered where they would place themselves in the story. One replied that, as a parent, she couldn't help but place herself in the shoes of Jairus, a terrified father, seeking help for his daughter wherever he could find it. Another shared that it's easier to place herself as someone in the crowd, curious and perhaps a little skeptical. I wonder where you'd locate yourself in these lines. Are you the one in search of healing? Are you the one lost in grief? Are you skeptical, curious, hopeful, uncertain?

Mark makes a point at the start of our passage to note Jesus' location. He is by the sea. Just verses earlier in chapter 4, he was asleep in a boat when a great storm arose, and his disciples utterly lost their religion in fear. Then, like now, Jesus doesn't jump to respond to the "emergency." Then, like now, Jesus asks his questions and takes his time. The crowd closes in around him, a woman touches, and Jesus waits. As one commentator pointed out, if Jesus were a pizza delivery guy, that pie would be free every time.¹ He's not one to jump in the ambulance. He's not worried about our timelines.

A leader in the synagogue named Jairus has just approached Jesus as he reached the shore. Fear for one's child can make a parent go to incredible lengths in search of a solution. We can imagine that by the time Jairus approaches Jesus, he has tried every medical and spiritual option available to him. He has pleaded with physicians. He has asked his colleagues and congregants to pray. He has used his considerable influence in the community to seek out innovative options. He has spent time and money to find a solution. All to no avail.



In desperation, he's made his way to the shore and falls at Jesus' feet. We can almost feel the relief and gratitude when Jesus agrees to help. We can visualize Jairus as he shoves and shouts his way through the crowd. And we can feel, too, the frenzy inside of him when Jesus stops because someone touched his clothes. It's an interruption along their way. Except it's not just an interruption; it's a person. A woman. A woman who had been suffering for twelve years, bleeding ... hemorrhaging. She's tried everything; nobody can help. She's at the end of her rope.

Mark doesn't often tell us the inner thoughts of his characters, but he does here. This woman has one thought as she draws close to Jesus: *She won't even need to ask him for healing. She certainly won't need to disturb his progress toward the house of an important person like Jairus. If she's lucky, these two men won't even notice her. All she has to do is touch Jesus, even just touch his clothes, and she's sure that will be enough.*

David Schnasa Jacobsen notes in his commentary that this woman is given very little agency at the explanation of her situation. Every Greek verb used to describe her is a past participle.

Now there was a woman who having suffered from hemorrhages ... having endured much under many physicians, and having spent all her money; and having not benefited, but rather having gotten worse. Now, having heard about Jesus, and having come from behind...ⁱⁱ

She is past-particpled to the max. She was what had happened to her. But then she "touched" Jesus' clothes. The verb tense changes. With one indicative verb, she suddenly has agency. She makes the choice; she takes the action. She is healed.

This woman was right about what she needs. But she was wrong about no one noticing. Jesus notices immediately and turns to see whom he has healed. There are so many people crowding in around him. So, he asks, and his disciples reply, "So many people are touching you, Jesus, what do you mean someone touched you? Half a dozen people probably touched you."

But the woman knows what Jesus means. She knows exactly what Jesus means. And though she has no idea what will happen now that she has interrupted this powerful man's journey to another powerful man's house, she comes forward, overcoming her fear, and kneels down to tell the truth.

Mark says the woman told Jesus "the whole truth." It's because of what she shared that we know about her predicament. It's because of what she tells of her twelve long years of suffering and disappointment and failed treatments that we know a bit about her story, though I wish we knew her name.

"Daughter," Jesus calls her, "*Daughter*, your faith has made you well."

Jesus could have kept cruising by, but he allowed space for the interruption. While everyone else is in a rush, Jesus stops and takes the time to know her and to make himself known to her.



Meanwhile, we can imagine Jairus' sense of urgency, quite probably even his panic and impatience. I don't know about you, but I would have been losing it in these moments—knowing your child's rescue was so close, and yet somehow still out of reach. We don't know if Jairus snaps or pleads or yells in that moment. All we know is that he waits when waiting seems unbearable.

Then Jairus receives the worst news a parent can get. His little girl is dead.

Now that the interruption of the bleeding woman is over, Jairus and Jesus continue on to the house. Because even when plans don't work out, Christ still walks with you. "Do not fear," Jesus says, "but believe." Jairus has to learn another kind of faith. The faith to keep walking in the valley of death.ⁱⁱⁱ The faith that endures past the worst kind of news. The faith that holds steady in the face of mocking, disbelieving laughter.

³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, [Jesus] 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.

Proclamations about resurrection of the dead sound foolish to the ears of the world. Of course, the people laugh. But Jesus enters in, pushes everyone else out but Jairus, the girl's mother, Peter, James, and John. He says to the girl, "*Talitha cum*," which means "get up." Immediately, the girl gets up.

And then we get the detail that explains why these two stories are sandwiched together: the little girl was twelve years old. The woman had been sick for twelve years. Jesus calls the woman "daughter," and restores her to health and wholeness. Here in the synagogue leader's house, Jesus touches a dead body (rendering Jesus himself unclean because of this touch) and Jairus' daughter is brought back to life. Two outsiders restored to life, two outsiders now daughters of God.

Today, in Israel, on the shores of Lake Galilee, is a place called Magdala—a Holy Land retreat center of sorts—with archaeological sites, space for worship, and rooms for travelers to board. Full of historical artifacts and religious art, Magdala houses a large mural. It depicts not the faces of the story, but the feet. It's hard to tell which feet are Jairus', which are the disciples', but it's clear to see which ones are Jesus' feet. This is a painting of feet, and yet it's not about the feet. It's about a miracle. It's about faith. It's about faith that still holds uncertainty.

The people in our story don't know *exactly* who Jesus is yet. There's a confidence named as faith that the woman and Jairus hold. This tells us something of the kind of people attracted to the gospel. Sometimes, faith means you're bold and you tell your whole truth. Sometimes, faith means you doubt your way through the recitation of a creed.

One of the hardest parts of healing and resurrection stories like these, is we can be left wondering where our miracle is.



Jesus healed the diseases of many people, but he did not eliminate all disease. He stilled a storm on the Lake of Galilee, but he did not make all storms cease. And he raised Jairus's daughter from death, but he did not banish death.^{iv} Plenty of people in Jesus' day still experienced the unimaginable loss of a child. Such horrific loss continues today. Suffering remains part of life. But those miracles that the Gospels record were signs of the inbreaking kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed.

Miracles as signs of the inbreaking kingdom. And those miracles still occur.

In Mark 5, we witness the miracle of thresholds crossed: we witness a daughter moved from exclusion to wholeness, and another daughter moved from death to life. We are left to consider what healing truly means. These two daughters of Israel come to see a new vision of who God is and what God values. In one, we see where Jesus demands we not see death where he sees life. In the other, he demands that legalism give way to love. In each story, Jesus embraces what is "impure" in order to show mercy. In each story, a previously hopeless daughter "goes in peace" because Jesus isn't a pronouncer of death, but a giver of new life.^v

Today, we are urged to consider where Christ's healing meets us. Where is his mercy bringing grace? How is his love mending the broken? Who is he calling beloved? Where are you in this story? The healing, the restoration doesn't always mean the cure. But it does always mean relationship, wholeness, *shalom*. Christ's kingdom is breaking in—wait for it, watch for it, and be bold to seek after it.

ⁱ Jacob Smith and the Rev. Aaron Zimmerman. "Pentecost 5 (B): Invisible Touch." *Same Old Song*, June 21, 2021. <https://thesameoldsong.fireside.fm/>.

ⁱⁱ David Schnasa Jacobsen. "Commentary on Mark 5:21-43." Working Preacher, for June 27, 2021. www.workingpreacher.org

ⁱⁱⁱ Debie Thomas. "Not Dead But Sleeping." Journey with Jesus, June 20, 2021. www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays

^{iv} Kathryn M. Schifferdecker. "Dear Working Preacher: Unimaginable." Working Preacher, June 20, 2021. www.workingpreacher.org

^v Thomas.

