

Week 5 - Mark 5:21-43

FORMERLY
KNOWN AS
CHRISTIAN

Once again, Jesus is on a boat crossing the Sea/Lake of Galilee.ⁱ He and his disciples have just come from the Eastern shore, where they had quite an encounter with demonic forces.ⁱⁱ When they arrive back on the Western side of the lake, immediately a crowd of people formed to be healed by and to hear the teachings of Jesus. Mark points out one man in particular from the crowd who falls down at Jesus' feet and pleads for the life of his daughter, who is on her deathbed. This man, Jairus, was an important man in the community. He was a leader in the local synagogue, a respected member of the community, and a man with social and religious influence. It likely would not have been much of a surprise to the crowd that Jesus would respond so quickly to the needs of such an important member of the community.

On the way to heal Jairus' desperately sick daughter, Jesus stops. Why? He felt someone touch him. Now, the reader knows that Jesus stopped because he felt (healing) power go out from him, for indeed a sick woman had just been healed by the touch of his robe. But there is no reason to believe that anyone else knew what was happening. Jesus just stopped and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" The text gives us his disciples' response: frustration. "Of course someone touched you," they said, "we're walking quickly through a crowded street!" What the text doesn't give us is Jairus' response. His daughter is dying, and it appears that Jesus wants to pick a bone with someone who touched his clothes! Imagine that you are in Jairus' position, and try to not be upset with Jesus.

And then *she* comes forward. A desperate, timid, *unnamed* woman; likely a social pariah; unclean; unwanted; terrified. She falls at Jesus' feet, confessing the "whole truth" (NIV, NRSV). I imagine her telling Jesus her entire story: all twelve years, every doctor, every expense, every failed remedy; regularly interrupted by her own tears. Having listened intently, Jesus responds simply, "*Daughter*, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over."

Immediately after this, Jairus' worst fears come to fruition: messengers come from his home to inform him of his daughter's death. "There is no use troubling the Teacher now," they say. Jesus ignores them, dismissing their unbelief. He turns to Jairus and says, "Don't be afraid. Just have faith." And it appears that Jairus believed Jesus. Upon arrival (finally...) at Jairus' house, the group is met by mourners.ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus sends them away, refusing to accept the death of the child. For this, Jesus was laughed at. Though we don't tend to laugh at people in such situations, how often do we dismiss people who we think are in denial? How often do we dismiss God's goodness and power because a situation or person seems unredeemable?

There is so much in this story^{iv} that it is difficult to exhaust its implications in a single sermon or devotional. It showcases not only Jesus' compassion and healing power, but also his willingness to break social barriers, his attentiveness to the needs of individuals, and his genuine love for those he comes into contact with. He sought out a woman who most people sought to avoid. He held the hand of a dead girl,^v raised her to life, and made sure her physical needs were met.^{vi}

I encourage you to sit with this story for a while. Feel the desperation, the frustration, and the despair of both Jairus and the woman.

Questions for discussion/reflection:

1. When have you been desperate? Can you relate to Jairus or the woman? Have you ever said, "why bother the Teacher anymore?"
2. Have you ever felt like Jesus was taking his sweet time with something you knew to be urgent? How did you react?
3. How can you be more attentive to the needs of those around you? How can you be more attentive to your own needs as well? Do you trust that God knows everyone's needs and desires their (and your) good?

ⁱ Geographically, most of Jesus' ministry occurred in the direct vicinity of the Sea of Galilee, which is in the Northeastern part of modern day Israel. Its Eastern shore is along the 1949 Israeli-Syrian Armistice line. Nazareth, Jesus' home town, is about 15-20 miles West of the Southernmost tip (where the Sea runs into the Jordan River).

ⁱⁱ This story will be the focus of next week's sermon and devotional.

ⁱⁱⁱ Likely professional mourners, who would have had little to no personal connection with the family. They would have been paid, in essence, to help the family mourn and to announce the death (by their cries and wails) to the community.

^{iv} Though there are two instances of healing, these stories work together as a single unit. Mark's literary style here is brilliant. He builds suspense, contrasts the social positions of Jairus and the woman, and clearly communicates the character of Jesus.

^v Dead bodies (as well as anyone with chronic bleeding) were considered ritually unclean in Jewish tradition. Jesus defies all social protocol in order to embrace these people.

^{vi} Apparently being dead is hungry work! Also, as Barry mentioned in his sermon, in the ancient world, eating was proof that a person was, indeed, alive!