

Sermon for June 27, 2021

Gospel reading: Mark 5:21–43 - Jesus Heals a Woman and Jairus's Daughter

21 And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. **22** Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet **23** and implored him earnestly, saying, "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** And he went with him.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. **25** And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, **26** and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. **27** She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. **28** For she said, "perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" **31** And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" **32** And he looked around to see who had done it. **33** But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. **34** And he 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, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" **36** But overhearing^[a] what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." **37** And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. **38** They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus^[b] saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. **39** And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." **40** And they laughed at him. But 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. **41** Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." **42** And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. **43** And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something

If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." **29** And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. **30** And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in

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These two stories that involve Jesus only very slightly overlap with each other. Otherwise, they don't seem to be much connected to each other, other than the fact that Jesus is the agent in both events. But even then the stories could easily stand alone. But St. Mark clearly doesn't want them to be told that way, and literally placed one story INSIDE the other. Each story takes up about half the narrative. There are many similarities that the stories share, and several contrasting connections are more than coincidental. Something like "opposites attract". Each story involves a female character in some distress. But there is a clear contrast between the two women. The first we hear of is the critical need of a little twelve-year-old girl who is remote from the situation. She is far away at home in bed. Jesus will have to go see her. The second is a woman, possibly old, who has been coping with a debilitating condition for twelve years and she is local, so local that she is close enough to reach out and touch Jesus. And she does. In fact she comes seeking Jesus out for healing. The father of the little girl acts as her agent. The woman with the flow of blood acts as her own agent.

Both stories include the presence of a large crowd of people; the woman with the flow of blood is alone in the crowd. She is trying not to be seen or be a bother to anyone. On the other hand, the large crowd of people are present on behalf of the little girl. They represent a person who is not alone but loved and cared for.

The woman who wanted to keep her situation a secret is called out to answer in public.
The little girl's condition is dealt with away from the public and asked to be kept quiet.
The woman has a relatively light problem (to us, anyway) that is treated with grave seriousness.
The little girl has a grave problem that is treated with relative lightness.
The crowd is allowed to remain present to witness the miracle of the woman.
The crowd is sent away and is not allowed to witness the miracle of the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead.
So we can see plainly that Mark is connecting these two events, not simply because they happened in this order, but because they are more deeply connected than it looks like at first.

My typical move with this story homiletically is to see the big picture of the imminent death of a well beloved child of an important public official being interrupted for the private concern of a lonely woman with an embarrassing personal problem. And to witness how our Lord is every much as concerned for her as he is for the girl at death's door.

Conflict is often set up in the stories we tell, by setting the hero in a bind between a ROCK and a HARD PLACE, where he can save ONE damsel in distress, but not the other one and from there he will have to choose which person to sacrifice or let down. But while this situation is a problem for us, it is not a problem for Jesus. The delay with the woman will not affect what he will be able to do for the synagogue leader or his child. The lesson is that "not even death is an obstacle" to Jesus. Jesus can and does raise the dead. And this should be good news to us, because we can often find ourselves in the situation of either person. Sometimes it seems like God isn't listening or is acting too slowly or is distracted and in both of these cases in our Gospel reading, GOD IS listening and aware of what is needed.

In the case of the woman, she tried to AVOID "bothering" Jesus with her problems. She figured he wouldn't notice if she touched him. Do we ever think like that? Do we figure God wouldn't listen to us, or that He has better things to do than be bothered by us?

In the case of Jairus, he did everything right, and came to Jesus and asked him for help and so did a lot of others on his behalf... but still it seemed like things were not moving along with any great sense of urgency. And then, it was too late... Jesus didn't get around to it in time and the opportunity was gone... until it wasn't.

Don't get hung up about Jesus asking them to keep this event quiet. It simply was not time yet to reveal who he was to everyone. And we see how that works against Jesus' ministry when people didn't keep quiet; he wasn't able to go into the towns and villages because of the crowds and instead had to stay out in the lonely places. That's all that's going on here, even though there are those that try to make hay out of it for different reasons.

But what I thought I would do this time is look at the text in conjunction with the Old Testament Lesson for the day and see if we might find another connection.

From Lamentations 3:22-33:

²²The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
²⁴“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”
²⁵The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.
²⁶It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.
²⁷It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.
²⁸Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him;
²⁹let him put his mouth in the dust— there may yet be hope;
³⁰let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults.
³¹For the Lord will not cast off forever,
³²but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
³³for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.

The lesson seems to be... calm down. Wait on the Lord to do what the Lord will do and TRUST that what's coming will not leave you stranded and without help.

And if you wait... wait patiently. And do not be afraid even if things look to have fallen completely apart. God isn't "doing something to you" with the intent to harm you or frustrate you or make you angry. There were 12 years mentioned here... that's a long time. I think it's descriptive of waiting. Implied in this is 12 years of joy only to end abruptly in pain. And 12 years of pain, only to end abruptly in joy. The first is tragic and the second is comic. The two together represent the drama of life on this earth.

It reminds me of another story in some respects... Robinson Crusoe. The actual story, not all the adaptations you have seen over the years, is certainly a Christian story, and deliberately so. But you must know that he was shipwrecked and marooned on an island. What you might not know was that he was alone on that Island for 13 years before Friday showed up, and then another 15 years before his rescue. That's a long time to feel forgotten and abandoned. And yet WE, the readers, know that God had not abandoned him.

I try to remember that each time I feel like God is moving too slowly for my tastes...to see this story, too, as reminding all of us to remain steadfast in times of adversity. Amen