

Jesus Heals Those Who Ask
Mark 5:21-43
Psalm 131

Westminster Presbyterian Church
Pastor Doug Browne
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Mark 5:21-43

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

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

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?' But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.' He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.' And 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. He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Psalm 131

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time on and for evermore.

The Gospel reading this morning is a story within a story, a kind of story sandwich. It starts right after last week's reading with Jairus, a desperate father of a deathly ill daughter. He is a leader of the synagogue, but his position and his middle-class respectability are no protection against his daughter's illness. Nothing in his world seems to be able to help.

Jairus is desperate. His little girl might claim to be a young woman, but, in the way that she will always be her father's little girl, she is still his little girl. And she is dying.

He is desperate enough to risk the embarrassment of asking this wandering, rabble-rousing rabbi into his home to try to heal his daughter – something most people would not believe he could even do.

What if Jesus says no? That risks public embarrassment without gaining anything for his daughter. That risks a serious loss of face, as everyone will see him grasping at straws to save her.

What if Jesus says yes? That risks something more –that he might be forced to change his view of God and of the world. He would have to take

seriously the idea that the almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, has put on human flesh and is walking around on earth telling people that the Kingdom of God is near.

Despite these risks, Jairus comes to Jesus and asks Jesus to come heal his daughter. And Jesus says yes!

Aaaaaand, wouldn't you know it, this is where our story gets interrupted. Jesus is walking to Jairus's house, and he gets stopped in the crowd. This is not a crowd like Broad and High on a weekday morning. The closest we have is the stands at the end of an OSU football game. This is a large, dense crowd, where everybody is kind of touching everybody else and nobody can really do anything about it.

A woman has been ill, bleeding for twelve years, and the physicians are baffled. She's spent all her money, and no one has been able to help her at all. Her bleeding makes her ritually unclean, and the uncleanness is contagious – she makes anyone who touches her unclean.

That is a serious thing. She is not allowed to touch anyone. Like the Demoniac last week, she is cast out from being part of her community. Like the Demoniac last week, this is, as far as we know, not her fault. She did nothing to deserve this.

By the rules of the day, she should be in seclusion. She should certainly not be in a crowd of people, where she's jostled all the time and

officially, she is making people unclean left and right without their even knowing it.

But she's desperate.

She is desperate enough to go out in public when she is not supposed to.

She is desperate enough to risk being killed or cast out forever to try to get Jesus to heal her.

She's too scared to go up to Jesus and talk with him, but she grabs the hem of his cloak for a minute. She touches Jesus, and he feels it. He feels the power leave his body and he asks, "Who touched me?"

The crowd laughs, but the woman whom he has just healed takes him seriously. She falls to her knees in front of him and confesses the whole truth: that she was unclean, that she came to him in search of healing, and that he healed her.

Jesus looks her in the eye, and he speaks directly to her. He calls her "daughter." He tells her that her faith has healed her. He tells her to go resume her life, finally free of the condition that has defined who she was for twelve years.

Then Jesus returns to his previous quest, to heal Jairus's daughter. But neighbors have come and found Jairus in the meantime. They say that the girl is dead. Jairus should stop bothering the rabbi, and come home to mourn.

Jesus tells the heartbroken father, "Do not fear, only believe."

"Do not fear, only believe." That is something that's easier said than done, isn't it? But Jairus is committed at this point – what else can he do?

So Jesus goes to Jairus's house and goes into the room where the girl is. He takes her by the hand and tells her to get up, and she does! She gets up and she's alive!

These two stories, the woman and Jairus's daughter, the pieces of the story sandwich, seem to be unconnected, until Mark mentions, right at the end, that the girl is twelve years old. The woman had been bleeding for twelve years. Both the woman and Jairus make themselves vulnerable in order to come to Jesus. They kneel before him, and acknowledge that he has the power to restore their broken lives.

Where the girl was literally dead, the woman might as well have been. She was cast out from the community, unclean, and worse, contagiously unclean. Nobody in their right mind would even be around her.

Well, as Robert Capon said, "Jesus came to raise the dead. The only qualification for [this] gift of the Gospel is to be dead. You don't have to be smart. You don't have to be good. You don't have to be wise. You don't have to be wonderful. You don't have to be anything. You just have to be dead."¹

¹ Quoted in Sara Miles, *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*.

What does that mean for us?

The woman had been bleeding for twelve years. That's a long time. Did you notice? She had not been healed before this.

She wasn't allowed to go to the Temple to make a sacrifice, but I'm sure that she had prayed. Oh, I'm sure that she had prayed long and often.

She had not come to Jesus the way she did here, totally vulnerable, not even asking for his attention, just wanting to touch his clothes. When she did that, she was healed.

Jairus had, I'm sure, consulted physicians, and I'm sure he had prayed. He had done everything.

EXCEPT...

He had not made himself totally vulnerable, let everyone see that he was desperate. Up to now, he had kept his dignity before God and man, as they say.

Now he falls to his knees and he begs Jesus. And Jesus heals the girl.

How often, when we have a problem, do we worry more about our own dignity and our feeling of self-reliance than we do about getting our problem solved?

How often do we say to ourselves, "I can't bother God with *that!*"

How often does it not even occur to us to pray about it?

How often do our prayers sound like, “You know, God, if so-and-so were to, totally coincidentally of course, feel better, that would be agreeable to me.”?

Jesus told a story once about prayer. He told a story of an unjust judge who nonetheless gave justice to a poor widow, because she wore him out. She kept coming to him, asking for what she needed, until he gave it to her, just to get her to shut up and go away. Jesus went on to say, if even an unjust judge would give a poor widow justice when she kept asking, how much more will God give God’s people what they need, if they keep asking?²

I’m not saying that you need to make a public spectacle of yourself. Jesus had things to say about that, too.³ But make yourself vulnerable before God. God already knows this stuff, so admit it! Admit it to God, anyway.

Don’t just come to God with your request list, like going to the grocery store. Come to God with everything happening in your life. Good, bad, and indifferent. Things you understand, and things you don’t understand. People

² Luke 18:1-8.

³ Luke 18:9-14.

you think you understand, and people you know are beyond your comprehension.

When we do that, we open ourselves up to Emmanuel, God truly with us. We can live into God's plans for us and for the world. When we do that, there are no limits.

We're going to talk more about prayer over lunch today at FAM, but, whether you join us at FAM or not, this is your homework for next week. Think about what happens in your life, and bring it to God. All of it, whether it's bad or good, big or small. You don't have to make a big public deal about it, but get into the habit of praying about everything. You'll give God the chance to change your life.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.