

Pentecost 5, 2021 (Mk 5:21-43; Lam 3:22-26; 31-33; Ps 30) SERMON, St. John

A story within a story—that's what we have in today's gospel. Jairus, the leader of the synagogue—one of the most respected people in the community—approached Jesus and begged him to come lay hands on his daughter, who was dying. Jesus, compassionate and willing, agreed to go with him.

But they were interrupted by *another* person in need of healing, this one an unnamed woman. We learn in the text that this woman's problems began about the same time Jairus's daughter was born, twelve years earlier.

For twelve years this woman had been suffering from hemorrhages. Not only had she been *ill* all that time, and spent all her money seeking a cure from the physicians of the day—she'd also been *ritually unclean*, a total outcast from her society.

Jewish law named three causes of *major uncleanness*: leprosy, bodily discharge, and death. According to the law, anyone who touched an unclean person was *contaminated* by that contact, and became just as unclean as the person touched.

For twelve long years this anonymous woman had been an outcast, as untouchable as a leper. According to law, she shouldn't even have been in the crowd that day.

Two people—a woman who was a *nobody* and a prominent civic leader who was definitely *Somebody*—both desperate for help. Both believing that Jesus could help. More importantly, both believing he *would* help.

Jairus and the woman sought out Jesus because they'd heard of his miraculous powers. *Everyone* had heard about the miracles he'd performed, the healings he'd done. Everywhere he went crowds followed him, seeking help for their own ills or problems.

There's a whole range of feelings in this text. Jairus comes, desperate for the life of his daughter, pleading with Jesus to save her life, relieved when Jesus sets out to accompany him.

Then the woman comes, knowing she shouldn't be out in public, to *steal healing* from the miracle worker. She's terrified when she feels the healing within her and sees that Jesus, too, has felt it.

The disciples are impatient with Jesus when he asks who touched his clothes—I mean, look at the crowd! *Everyone's* pushing and shoving. What do you mean, who touched you?

And imagine how Jairus feels when Jesus gets distracted by an outcast woman. His daughter is *dying*; only Jesus can save her. And here he is, trying to find one person in the midst of a crowd—one person who touched him, siphoning off his power. *Hurry, Jesus*, he must be silently begging, *save your power for my little girl!*

Then suddenly it's too late. Messengers report to Jairus that his daughter is dead. *Don't bother Jesus*, they say—but Jesus tells him, **Don't be afraid, just believe**. He reaches out to take her by the hand, and she rises up living.

In both healings, it's astonishing that Jesus isn't concerned about what effect his work will have on him. Without hesitation he reassures the unclean bleeding woman she's welcome to the healing power that went out from him.

Far from *condemning* her, he calls her *daughter*, re-establishing her connection with humanity as an acceptable member of the Jewish nation.

Then he reaches out to touch the seemingly dead twelve-year-old—and *dead* is as unclean as you can get. By law Jesus should now be required to make a sacrifice and spend time in ritual cleansing before coming in contact with the public again.

But everyone can see that Jesus hasn't been contaminated by his direct physical contact with disease. His authority and power are so great, he brings people up to *his* level instead of being dragged down to theirs. The healing power of Jesus is based in *love*, not in *law*.

How can we, who haven't really experienced the kind of miracles related by Mark—how can we enter this story and allow it to speak to us in a meaningful way? Everyone knows that Jesus performed miracles, that he was a healer and raised people from the dead. But that was 2000 years ago!

It's not that we don't believe those things happened—it's just that most of us don't expect them to happen nowadays, or at least not to us or our loved ones. So where's the power of this gospel lesson for us today?

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We all suffer the consequences of living in a sin-sick world. The perfect world God created has been perverted and distorted by the power of sin, death, and evil. We live *in* that world, but we belong to a *different* world.

Through our baptism into Christ we've already been transferred into the kingdom of God. With Jeremiah, the author of Lamentations, we proclaim,

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. . . . The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. . . . (Lam 3:22-33).

It's also good that one should reach out and touch the hem of Jesus' garment, or grasp his hand outstretched in love, compassion, and healing. Like Jairus and the bleeding woman, we are bold to trust his promises—the promises he died to give us!

So come to the Supper! Reach out to Jesus and touch not the hem of his cloak but his own body and blood. Risk believing and pray for faith. And whatever burdens you're bearing, hear Jesus tell you, **Your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed.**

Thanks be to God!