

Faith and Humility

Mark 5:21-43

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 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?" ³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ 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, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Our scripture is a Healing within a Healing. When a wealthy man wanted Jesus to heal his daughter, he had to wait for the healing of a destitute woman.

As in last week's scripture, Jesus crossed the sea, a "great crowd" gathered on the other side, and he taught by the sea (5:21). A ruler of the synagogue named Jairus approached Jesus. Such leaders were highly esteemed and often well-to-do. Jairus recognized Jesus as a healer and honored him by "falling down at his feet" (v. 22). A man of honor, he rendered unusual honor to a traveling preacher because of his dying daughter. He appealed to Jesus, saying that his daughter faced her final days (*eschatōs*). Jairus believed that Jesus could "lay his hands" on the girl and "she will be saved and

live" (v. 23). In the Jewish context, sacrifice, blessing, and ordination employed "laying on of hands." Jesus repeated the practice several times for healing purposes (6:5; 8:25). "Salvation" and "life" relate to both restoration of physical health and spiritual salvation. Jesus agreed to travel with the man to address his need. A large crowd also followed, which "presses upon" Jesus, his disciples, and the synagogue ruler (v. 24).

But, there was an interruption in the journey (vv. 25-29). Suddenly a woman appeared, but not in a public way. She had suffered for twelve years "with a flow of blood" (v. 25), which implied a menstrual disorder. She had had many physicians, spent "all that she had" (v. 26), and still grew worse. She heard about Jesus and sought him out. She perhaps had a magical understanding of Jesus' healing powers, for she said to herself, "even if I touch his garments I will be saved [*sōthēsomai*]" (v. 28). Later in the narrative Jesus said her faith made her well and secured her salvation (v. 34, another form of *sōzō*). Whether magic or faith was on her mind, the text indicates the "immediate" (see 1:10, 12, 21, 23, 29, 30, etc.) cessation of her blood—"it was dried up" and "she knew that her body was healed from its illness" (v. 29).

Mark tells of Jesus' reaction (vv. 30-34). Also "immediately," Jesus "knew in himself that a power had gone out from him" (v. 30a). The healing power of God was made available to this woman through Jesus. The exchange of power created the opportunity for dialogue. Jesus asked the crowd, "Who touched my garment?" (v. 30b). The disciples, who generally lacked insight, wondered who *had not* touched Jesus. The woman came forward to make public her desperate, private search for healing. Her illness made her ritually impure—she had to remain on the fringes of society, a private, not a public person, but now she had been "outed" by her attempt to seek refuge from a very public person. She too, like the synagogue ruler, fell at Jesus' feet in homage and sought his mercy for her touch that should have made *him* ritually impure (see Lev. 15:19-33). Jesus had already shown he was less concerned about touching the impure than about showing them mercy (see 1:41). Thus he called this unnamed woman "daughter" and said, "Your

faith has saved you" (v. 34a). Moreover, he sent her away in peace, because her faith humility had made her "healthy" from her illness (v. 34b). Thus Jesus provided a very public acknowledgment of a private healing.

But, back to Jairus' Daughter (vv. 35-36). That public encounter with the hemorrhaging woman occurred before a public figure. Then news came that Jairus' daughter had died. His household messengers played a role like that of the disciples in the intercalated story of the woman. They thought the synagogue ruler must go home to grieve and "not trouble the teacher" (v. 35). The messengers did not address Jesus, a mere carpenter and healer. They addressed only their superior, but Jesus "overheard." He urged the ruler, as he did the woman, "Do not fear, only believe" (v. 36).

When the trip began, crowds followed (v. 24). Jesus then moved from public to private space. He took only three of his most trusted disciples—Peter, James, and John (v. 37). When they arrived at Jairus' house, hired mourners were "weeping and wailing" with much "confusion" (v. 38a). Recognizing their lack of faith, Jesus asked, "Why are you confused and crying? The child is not dead but sleeps" (v. 39). What is the difference between death and this euphemism for death? Suggestions that the child was really in a coma do not suffice. Jesus admonished everyone that death is not the final answer. In the presence of God's healing power, even death cannot sustain its stronghold. In comparison to death without hope, this child had hope for restored life, so she was merely "sleeping."

The mourners laughed, so Jesus kicked them out and allows only the father, the mother, and the three disciples to enter the girl's room (v. 40). This restoration evokes similar private healings by the prophets Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:32-37). Jesus took the child by the hand and in his native Aramaic commanded, "*Talitha, cum...* little girl, get up!" "Immediately" God's healing power was manifested! The girl rose and walked around! She was twelve years old, having lived as long as the woman had been sick (v. 42). The private group that witnessed the healing was "amazed with great amazement." Jesus ordered them to tell no one (v. 43a; cf. 1:25, 33, 44; 3:12), but

the girl's funeral rites had already begun. Word naturally spread quickly. Jesus demonstrated a final act of compassion when he instructed that the girl be fed (v. 43b). This demonstrated both that she was very much alive and needed sustenance, and that Jesus had concern for her humanity, as he had for the outcast woman. **Efrain Agosto**

Commentator Michael Lindvall has a friend, a man of deep faith, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease when he was still in his fifties. He and his wife prayed that he might be healed. Twenty years later, he is in the last debilitating stages of the disease. Nevertheless, he once told Michael that his prayers had been answered. He said in all sincerity, "I *have* been healed, not of Parkinson's disease, but I have been healed of my fear of Parkinson's disease." These two biblical healing stories in which people turn to Jesus, in faith and humility for healing will raise the question in many of us, "Does prayer work?" If we mean by this, "Do you get what you pray for?" the honest answer will be "Sometimes, but not always." Pray as we may, we know that all prayers are not answered as we pray them.

In both cases, Jarius and the woman humbled themselves to seek healing. The woman even risked stoning. It may be helpful to remember that prayers for healing are not simply utilitarian. That is to say, prayer is not simply a matter of bending the into the crowd – possibly making everyone she touched unclean. Jarius humbled himself – a leader in the religious community – who went to see the healer – when his fellow Jewish leaders thought Jesus was a charlatan or healed by the power of demons.

These stories teach us that, beyond even physical healing, acceptance, intimacy, and touch can make us whole and give us peace. We are, in fact, shaped and made human *in relationship* to other persons. Our relationships—in the church, in friendships, and in marriage—are not just something extra added on to life for distraction and entertainment, as if we would be complete human beings in individual isolation. Relationship, "touch" if you will, makes us human and whole. As the contemporary Scottish philosopher John Macmurray once phrased it, "I need 'you' in order to be myself." **Michael L. Lindvall**

This reminds us that our lives are relational. Hezekiah Walker in his song *I Need You To Survive*, pens these words in the chorus:

I need you, you need me
We're all a part of God's body
Stand with me, agree with me
We're all a part of God's body

Later he says:

You are important to me, I need you to survive
You are important to me, I need you to survive!

In faith and humility, we must all come before God and make our requests!

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16).