

**Healing, Wholeness and Holiness (part I)**  
Mark 5:21-43 Oak Grove Presbyterian Church Bill Chadwick  
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In our Bibles we do not have just a single record of the life and teachings of Jesus. We have four: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They have some similarities to one another, but also vast variations. Let us remember that the writers, perhaps better to call them *editors*, of the gospels did not intend to provide an objective chronicle of the works and words of Jesus: Jesus went to a certain town and did this and said that and so on. The gospels are not biographies per se. Rather, they are masterful works of literary art, constructed decades after the event, in order to make various theological and political points. We will only be able to appreciate fully the significance of today's lectionary gospel reading if we keep that in mind.

Scholars believe that Mark's gospel is the recollections of the disciple Peter, reworked by John Mark. John Mark likely comes from the family that owned the upper room in which Jesus presided at his last supper. After Jesus' resurrection John Mark joins Paul and Barnabas on Paul's first missionary journey. But enough for now about John Mark.

In Mark's gospel today's healing stories come hard on the heels of the story of Jesus exorcizing the demon-possessed man, who had been hiding out in the tombs in the Gerasene territory. Jesus expels the legion of demons into a herd of pigs, which then run into the sea. That takes place in the territory of the Gerasenes on the eastern, that is, Gentile side of Galilee and the man Jesus healed was a Gentile. Now we return to the Jewish territory. Listen for the word of God.

**Mark 5:21-43 (Today's New International Version)**

**Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman**

*<sup>21</sup> When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. <sup>22</sup> Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. <sup>23</sup> He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." <sup>24</sup> So Jesus went with him.*

*A large crowd followed and pressed around him. <sup>25</sup> And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. <sup>27</sup> When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup> because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." <sup>29</sup> Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. <sup>30</sup> At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"*

*<sup>31</sup> "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' "*

*<sup>32</sup> But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."*

*<sup>35</sup> While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"*

<sup>36</sup> Overhearing <sup>[a]</sup> what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

<sup>37</sup> He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. <sup>38</sup> When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." <sup>40</sup> But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). <sup>42</sup> Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. <sup>43</sup> He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Two powerful stories, one sandwiched within the other. This is such a rich passage. We could mine it for hours. Take the battery out of the clock and settle in! (Nervous laughter) Actually, I don't want to be like my grandpa's pastor. Whenever someone asked my Grandpa Brown about that morning's sermon, Grandpa would say, "Wellllll, he missed a lot of good stopping places."

So, we'll start today to take a look together at this passage and finish next week.

Let's walk our way through this passage.

Mark's early listeners would have noticed the repetition of the number twelve. The girl is twelve years old. The woman has been ill for twelve years. For the Hebrew people twelve is a very noteworthy number, signifying the twelve tribes of Israel. And there were twelve disciples. "Get ready," warns William Willimon, "we are about to hear a story that challenges the faith community, the insiders—us. (In the healing of the Gerasene demoniac Jesus) shockingly ministered to the outsiders, the Gentiles. (He) is now home, ready to shock the insiders—us." (*Pulpit Resource*, April-June, 2009, p. 58)

As soon as Jesus is back in Jewish territory the crowds descend upon him and a man appears out of the crowd. The man's name is Jairus and he is the leader of the local synagogue, which means he is the president of the board of elders, responsible for the conduct of the services, a man of great responsibility and decorum, one who does things "decently and in order." He is probably a Pharisee. He is one of the "big deals," a high muckety-muck in the community, and one used to sending messengers to do his bidding. But in the desperation born out of concern for his beloved daughter, Jairus doesn't trust this errand to anyone else, and he forgets all decorum; he ignores the fact that other Pharisees would want him to stay away from Jesus. He throws himself at Jesus' feet and begs Jesus to come and lay hands on his critically-ill daughter, to heal her.

"So Jesus went with him." (vs. 24) A simple, but oh so significant sentence.

We can imagine Jairus' heart leaping in gratitude that Jesus was interruptible.

...Until Jesus was interrupted again.

In the jostling crowd a woman, also in desperate need of healing, has wormed her way in close enough to touch Jesus' robe, and instantly she could feel in her body that she was healed of her long-standing illness. But before she can slip away, Jesus stops and says, "Who touched me? I felt power going out of me."

Indeed, who is this woman? The gospel writers don't even record her name. Unlike Jairus, she is not one of the big deals of the community. Number one, she is a woman. Number two, she is broke. What money she had she has spent on doctors in an unsuccessful attempt to be healed. Female and poor. Two strikes against her. But the third strike, a giant one, she has a constant discharge of blood which makes her ritually unclean according to the Levitical laws (ch. 15).

Her condition would make it impossible for her to find a job as a household servant and would, ironically, make her ineligible to attend Jairus' synagogue (Charles B. Cousar, in *Texts for Preaching*, 1993, p. 410). Every chair she sits on becomes ritually unclean. The bed she lies on is ritually unclean. If she had been married, her husband no doubt years earlier had divorced her.

Possibly she can't touch her children or perhaps is not allowed even to see them. She has to live outside the camp, in isolation, like a leper. I can't imagine how desolate her life is.

And, according to Jewish law, anyone who touches this woman becomes unclean like she is unclean.

Except Jesus.

When she touches Jesus the contagion went the other direction. Her touch did not make Jesus unclean. His healing power made her clean! And whole. And restored her to the community.

He breaks all social conventions by speaking to this woman in public. And what does he call her? He calls this woman, "Daughter." This might seem patronizing to us, but it is a warm and endearing term for a beloved member of the family, a term which she may not have heard for a long, long time. (Donovan) "Daughter."

Meanwhile, the interruption of the journey to Jairus' house heightens the tension of the story and must be driving Jairus mad. Before Jesus is finished speaking with this woman, some messengers come from Jairus' house to give the news Jairus was dreading, "Your daughter is dead. Don't bother the teacher any more."

But Jesus continues on to the house where they find that people are already in full mourning mode, as is the custom, wailing and playing flutes. Jesus reprimands them, enters the house, takes the girl by the hand (which again should have made him ritually unclean, touching a corpse, but once again the power flows the other way) and bids her arise ...which she does. She is restored to life and returned to her astonished parents.

As Scott Hoezee (*The Touch*) notes, twice in this story Jesus is touched by or himself touches someone ritually and ceremonially unclean but not only is Jesus not contaminated, the ones who had been contaminated to begin with are made holy and whole. Jesus has crossed the boundaries that had once defined the community, has rewritten the rules, and so has revealed a new day. Make no mistake: this story is all about the creation of a New Israel.

Where are the connections between these stories and our stories? I would like to suggest four. One today and three next week.

But first, let's deal with an aspect that may be troubling you. It troubles me. Jesus says to the woman, "Your faith has made you well" and to Jairus, "Don't pay attention to the people who say your daughter is dead, just believe." And their faith is magnificently rewarded! A miracle healing! A corpse brought back to life!

What if we aren't healed? Is it because we don't have enough faith? Some miracles. Usually not.

I knew a man who suffered greatly from clinical depression to the point where he needed to be hospitalized. This man was deeply devout, a faithful churchman, an active member of the Gideons, with a strong faith. His sister—well-meaning, I am sure—when he was hospitalized kept sending him tracts and notes suggesting that if he just had enough faith he would be well. That was SO hurtful to him!

Friends, it wasn't a matter of enough faith. It was a matter of enough chemicals in the brain. On the right meds he was perfectly healthy.

The last thing we need is for people to add insult to our injury.

So where do we find living word for our lives of faithfulness today?

Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, was on the top rung of society; this woman was so low she couldn't even see the bottom rung. Jesus was concerned for both the top dog and the most oppressed and brought healing to both situations.

The encounter with the ill woman would have been especially shocking for the people of that day. She's a woman. She's unclean. Yet Jesus welcomes her touch and publicly addresses her and speaks with praise and tenderness. Throughout Mark's gospel we see an ever-expanding inclusivity of God's kingdom.

Is our care and concern equally inclusive?

We have a beautiful building here. And you keep it in great shape, always neat and sparkling. Now, I recognize that things are in flux right now because we no longer have a night watchperson. Because of this unsettled situation in the three and a half weeks I have been here I have heard at least a dozen conversations, maybe two dozen conversations, about locking doors and setting alarms and how we keep people out of the building. But I haven't heard so many conversations about how we *welcome* people into the building, especially the downtrodden, the equivalent of this woman with the hemorrhage. And not just how do we welcome folks into our building, (well, it's not *our* building, it's *Christ's* building) but how do we mobilize to go out and be in ministry with the least and the lost where they are?

Is our care and concern as inclusive as Jesus' care and concern?

A little side story. There is in today's world a quite literal companion piece to this gospel story. My brother-in-law, Kris's big brother, Mark Jacobson, is a physician in Tanzania under the auspices of the Lutheran Church. He's been there thirty years. Under his direction a thirty-bed commissary has become two large modern hospitals serving thousands of people each year with state-of-the art medical care. One of the new procedures they are undertaking is to repair fistulas.

This comes from their website. *Imagine a mother who lives deep in the bush when she goes into labor at home, perhaps with the help of a traditional midwife. If the baby is too large to pass through the birth canal, the baby's head exerts enormous pressure on the vaginal, rectal and bladder tissues which then die and results in leakage of urine or stool through the vagina (a vesico-vaginal or recto-vaginal fistula). The child usually dies in the process.*

*The joy of an expected child is replaced with a new problem: the continual leaking of urine and/or stool. It is impossible for her to stay clean. Her husband may banish or divorce her. Her family may send her away or keep her at distance from the family hut because of her smell. She is now "unclean."*

*Selian Hospital began the first center for fistula repair in northern Tanzania and the center also serves the southern third of Kenya. The surgery is difficult and requires special training and experience. Drs. Sweke and Kisanga both perform hundreds of fistula repairs annually. In 2002 Selian opened a 16-bed ward dedicated to the specialized post-operative care needed by fistula patients.*

When the women are healed they are welcomed back into their families and the community. Isn't that an amazingly similar situation to the woman in Mark chapter 5?

Perhaps some of us will be moved to support their work in prayer or with money, continuing the healing ministry of Jesus.

So, next week we will continue on with this passage. The living word for today is to embrace the least and the lost, and love this world on behalf of Jesus.

To God be the honor and the glory and the praise, now and forever! Amen!