

Providence Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Dr. David Pettit  
July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Mark 5: 21-45

We read the beginning and end of this passage last week, and we focused on Jairus. We left out the interruption in the middle, which gets woven together with the Jairus story. We concentrated on Jairus as a man of integrity, a person of Jewish faith and leadership, and how all that poise and dignity falls away in this moment of vulnerability and need. He is reduced to tears and falling to the ground over the sickness of his child. Life has humbled him, and he cries out to Jesus, who heeds his request. We talked about Christ responding to us, not because of our resumes or having our lives put together, but because of our cries for help, our vulnerability, our humility.

That theme is explicated further in the fuller story, that Christ responds to us out of compassion and grace and not our resumes or what boxes we may check on a questionnaire. And the theme of who deserves Christ's help and healing is drawn out further. Because there is an interruption in the story, a time-consuming interruption that seems to contribute to the fact that Jairus' daughter dies while Jesus is delayed. Jairus has fallen to the ground crying and begging repeatedly, and Jesus gets side-tracked on the way back.

And what makes the interruption more dramatic is that their society had a way of separating people, having categories where some were on the right side and others on the wrong side. There are people who are your people and you are responsible for, and there are people who are not your people and who you are not responsible for. They viewed each other through these differences. You see, that is what provides the drama in this story. Because Jairus, a synagogue leader, a colleague of Jesus, a fellow countryman, a clean and upstanding and scripture following man has come to Jesus crying out for his little Jewish girl. Jairus' daughter falls on the right side of these lines. Jairus' daughter is Jewish, so she is of the right race, rightfully within the land. She is a child of a Jewish synagogue leader in Galilee. She lives in a way that is clean, eating clean foods. She has been taught the law. She is deserving of the sympathy and compassion of a Jewish teacher, one like Jesus. So Jesus responds to a fellow citizen, Jairus, to a fellow teacher of the faith, to one of his own. We take care of our own.

But as he goes, there is an interruption in the story on the "other" side of the lake. Whenever we hear the phrase "the other side" in the gospels, we should expect that the Jewish v. gentile divide is involved. For as he had just arrived on the "other

side” of the lake, the Gentile side, the non-Jewish side, the unclean side, the non-law conforming side, crowds had formed. They had heard of Jesus too, even over there. They had heard of what he was doing. So they came. But just as they came, Jairus catches up with Jesus, cries out for his daughter, and Jesus immediately starts to leave to head back, back to the Jewish side of the lake. But the crowd is pressing in around him, wanting him to stay, to teach, to heal.

A woman is in the crowd. Her story is one of desperation, sadness, isolation. She has lived with a bleeding condition that has affected her her whole life—a detail of the story that allows the reader to firmly place her in this unclean place, firmly grasp her desperation and helplessness. We can locate her on the Gentile side of the lake. She is not Jewish. She is not of the land. She is not clean. You see, in their society, they had a way of separating themselves from each other. They saw each other through their differences. We don’t do such things, but they did.

The intertwining of these two stories sets up this contrast, draws to light the way they distinguished themselves from one another. This had implications for who God favored and who God would call children, who God would love and help, who is your people and not your people, and who you are responsible for and who you are not responsible for. But this woman, in her desperation, persists even though she is not of the same people as Jesus. And perhaps she suspects that Jesus will see her as not his people and someone he is not responsible for and not heal her. Cloaked by the crowd, she presses through to touch the hem of Jesus’ robe.

It is told in a way that evokes for the reader that prophecy from Malachi: “healing shall be in his wings.” The word translated “wing” is canaph, which is also the word for the edge of one’s garment, or the place on one’s robe where one’s tassels hang down, or where metals or beads might be attached to signify status in the community. She reaches out to just touch the hem of his garment, his canaph. As she touches the hem of his robe, she feels the healing, and so does Jesus.

A connection has happened. A transfer of power, of energy, of healing. But the story presents it as an involuntary exchange. Jesus did not initiate it, or authorize it, or vet the recipient. She did not ask. She did not apply. She did go through the proper channels. I suspect that if she did, she worries that she would have been refused. Because she knows that they sifted people apart in her society, and then judged according to conditions, as if it was her fault, and as if it made her a bad person. She is unclean, and she knows it. She is on the margins of society, and no one is going to voluntarily invite her out of those margins. So, she sneaks a healing, covertly takes access to what she needs. She crosses a border, a separation line—non-Jewish touching Jewish, woman touching man, un-clean touching clean.

Jesus stops! He calls out what has happened. In the chaos of the crowd the disciples don't really comprehend what he is talking about, but if they did, they too might call for an investigation, an inquiry into what just took place. Jesus wants to know who, and despite calls to just keep moving along, Jesus waits. Like a border guard who wants to see documents, he won't relent. And what is more, that while this person is taking up all this time in the diversion and distraction, the poor Jewish girl, the center and focus of the story at the start and who deserves the attention, dies.

The woman confesses. She turns herself in. She tells the truth. She "came in fear and trembling, [and] fell down before him," in dramatic similarity to what Jairus had done in his fear and anxiety. Sometimes the similarity of our human experiences transcends our differences. But Jairus had his papers in order. She does not. And She does not fall in fear and trembling for no reason. She is no fool. She knows what those in power can do to one like her. She has seen it happen.

But what Jesus reveals in his response is not a concern to protect these divisions. He does not want to identify her in order to check her papers. He did not hold court to condemn her, or to take back what she had attained from him. He is not there to call out their difference, not there to scapegoat on her society's ills.

"Daughter," he calls her. "Daughter." The same word used to refer to Jairus' girl. Daughter. Just as the cries for Jairus' daughter moved Jesus to change course and to go back, the silent cries of this daughter cause him to stop and name her and to bless her. Her cries and her trembling appear to him the same, equally valid, equally powerful to evoke sympathy and compassion. Jesus, in this moment, stands outside of their societal ways of thinking and seeing. He does not see her as his countrymen do. Perhaps when the scripture says that God's ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts higher than our thoughts, perhaps this is something of what it means. God does not operate by the categories we have come to operate by, to see by, to think by, to feel by.

Jesus confronts these divisions and the entangled sinews of society grown around these divisions. This is a big deal in a society that has come to operate along the lines of difference. It is a big deal in a society that sees each other along those lines, that defines who is a neighbor or a friend to you and who is not, that is who you are responsible for and who you are not. You see, this is the crux of the issue around "righteousness" in the Bible, it is about doing right by those for whom you are responsible for, to be in right relationship. So the central question then, who are you responsible for? This blurring of boundaries is a big deal in a time when there

are old hurts and old stigmas, and when we have come to define ourselves not through clear statements of identity, but by who we are not.

Luckily, this is their issue, right? We are modern people, products of progress and evolution, educated and advanced. We are not so inclined to be so parochial as to have fenced in notions of who God blesses and who we are responsible for. We are not so inclined to create categories that we sift each other out according to. Things like clean v. unclean, male v. female, Jew v. Gentile, right v. left, elephant v. donkey, capitalism v. socialism, male v. female, blue lives v. black lives, pro-life v. pro-choice, citizen v. immigrant, legal v. illegal, successful v. unsuccessful, gay v. straight, fly-fisherman v. bait-fisherman. 1st world vs 3rd world. Christian world vs Muslim world. Jew v. Palestinian.

We could easily go on. And some of these distinctions may draw no emotive response for you, and other distinctions would likely be harder for you to let go of, harder to say that it is not an important distinction, or a division that ought to be maintained, like fly fisherman v. bait fisherman. But the central question and implication in this story for them, and for us, is who does God love and redeem and call children? And who are we to view as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters who we are connected to and responsible for, and to whom we ought to be in the right relationship?

Now the way this woman goes about her healing brings out another aspect of all this: the way these categories and ways of dividing and assessing value and dignity get internalized. Now, it may be that she could say that these are not real divisions but its reality and so I'm going to be strategic and try to sneak through the crowd. It is more likely that she has internalized a notion that she is unclean, that she is unworthy, that she is not a neighbor and not someone Jesus or his compatriots see them connected to or responsible for. It is likely that when called out amid the crowd, all those feelings of being an outsider and someone scrutinized by others got triggered. All those feelings of shame and unworthiness. So when we are told that she "came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth," it is likely that she does so as one who has come to believe that she is less, that she is unworthy. Because these ways of talking reflect enculturated ways of thinking and feeling, and we internalize them.

So when Jesus says, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease," I suspect it was many miles down the road, replaying those words in her head, before they started to even resonate with implication. Go in peace, he says, and he affirms her faith. He affirms her faith, affirms her dignity, and sends her on in peace and blessing.

And the little girl who dies in the meantime, the rightful one who get's short-changed by this other woman, she too will get Jesus' attention. Jesus will come, but rather than affirming Jairus' faith as he did with this woman, he will have to teach this synagogue leader's household about faith, and nurture their faith in the process. He will show that the one they have dismissed has something to teach them.

So while Jesus responds to Jairus as a fellow-countryman, the cries of this foreign daughter are heard as well, even when uttered silently in the cover of the crowd. And what Jesus does not allow is for this equal daughter to remain in the margins, for her story to go unheard, and for her to go unrecognized, nor for her to be healed, but still be viewed as un-clean.

And what these two intertwined stories provide a glimpse into is God's way of seeing that transcends the divisions we have adopted, perpetrated, and internalized. Paul writes in Galatians 3: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ," he says, "then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." Well, what does that mean? You are part of the same community, same family of God. You are neighbors and friends, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. You cannot claim any righteousness if you do not see yourselves as responsible for one another and if you do not live in right relationship to one another.

Paul gives us a shortened list of divisions. Three. A list of three in the Bible is never exhaustive, however. A list of three is representative, indicative. He doesn't list all divisions that are no longer valid, but gives three biggies to suggest all other divisions are also invalid. So this story of two daughters and this proclamation of Paul in Galatians invite us to think anew, as God does, to see ourselves and others outside of all these lines of division, as God's children in relationship with God and responsible for one another. The Bible gives us a vision of such things. That the lion and the lamb will lie together, and the fly fisherman and the bait fisherman will fish together (I think that's in there!). Our liturgy reminds us that God will gather us into one house to eat at one table. And so, if that is how it ends, we should probably start living like it now.

And all God's people said... Amen.

*A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed*

*(Mt 9:18–26; Lk 8:40–56)*

<sup>21</sup> When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. <sup>22</sup> Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet <sup>23</sup> 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.” <sup>24</sup> So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. <sup>25</sup> Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup> She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup> for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” <sup>29</sup> Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. <sup>30</sup> Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” <sup>31</sup> And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’ ” <sup>32</sup> He looked all around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

<sup>35</sup> 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?” <sup>36</sup> But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” <sup>37</sup> He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. <sup>38</sup> When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” <sup>42</sup> And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. <sup>43</sup> He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.