

**June 30, 2024
Mark 5:21 – 43
Church of All Nations**

We have spent about a month in the Hebrew scripture following the story of the nation from a period of leadership under Judges to a Monarch. We have followed the first two kings, Saul and David. But today we will move to the Christian scripture.

Today's gospel from Mark consists of two stories beautifully woven together. They are full of lots of small details. One story includes the other and both inform each other. When Biblical scholars are not being too esoteric and snobbish they may call it a "Markan sandwich".

2 females in today's reading The older woman with the 12 year flow of blood and the by now dead 12 year old girl- (one of many "compare and contrasts" we will come across. It's a heady and potent cocktail of uncleanness Mark is mixing up for us - bloody and dead - for the devout and orthodox of Jesus time it could not get much worse. Ritually unclean and to be avoided at all costs.

Religions historically have spent a good deal of time dividing people, objects, behaviour into what is holy and pure in contrast to what is defiled. In Leviticus you can read whole chapters in the so called purity code of what is acceptable and unacceptable. The birth of the Christian faith brought major convulsions in this area.

It all starts to come off the rails when the metaphor of cleanliness, drawing on the purity code, then gets easily transferred to the moral realm. People who eat different animals to us must be a bit morally questionable, people who engage in different sexual preferences and practices can evoke a disgust reaction. Mostly it is irrational, or at least pre or non rational. But as David Hume said, "Reason . . . is the slave of the passions." Our moral judgments tend to be quick and instinctive rather than well reasoned and reflective. Our reasoned explanations are often found to be ad hoc rationalizations for what we feel to be true in our guts. We dress them up with the aura of divine decree and now how heavy it will sit upon anyone forced to carry this load. These become boundary creating and monitoring exercises

Lets look a bit deeper into these stories.

We have the immense love of a father, he's got a name Jairus, in contrast to the woman, a synagogue leader no less, yet does not flinch at prostrating himself publicly before an itinerant non establishment rabbi to beg for his attention and favour. Lovely and moving image.

Foreign to many of us as we grew up in an age of our father, and maybe mothers, as more dour stoic types. Could you ever imagine your father running to someone and throwing himself at their feet to intercede for you? Maybe we became our mother and father in that characteristic. We wanted to be more the type of parent or aunt or uncle who would throw themselves down in a passionate gesture of supplication and love, but did not really know how.

Breaking into this story so Jairus now has to endure an excruciating interruption to the healer's journey to his home and daughter, while the Healer tends to this unclean woman who would not even have been allowed by religious law, into Jairus synagogue. Maybe part of his role was adjudicating on who and what was ritually clean and unclean. And now he stands by while the Rabbi looks for her and converses with her. While he can go directly to the holy man, she literally has to snatch her mercy from God, out on the streets, when the holy man Jesus walks on by.

We learn here that God interrupts. The Spirit will not be corralled into our neat timetables. Which sounds pretty pedestrian but, we live in age that aggressively demands we fill every moment of our day. If we are so time poor where can God possibly get a toe in?

There is a throng, many pressing in and on Jesus we are told. Surely others were touching Jesus as well; why were they not healed? Why not everyone who had ingrown toe nails and arthritis and poor hearing now healed. We don't know, but we are told Jesus feels power go out and asks who touched him. This is another sign of the remarkable ability of Jesus to see the individual in a crowd.

At no other times in the four gospels is any reference to a healing even vaguely similar to this – where an anonymous figure surreptitiously grabs hold of Jesus clothing and snatches power and healing from him. And it costs Jesus something, he feels power/healing go out from him. Cost of healing/ministry. This is why Jesus is depleted at times, why he goes off by himself for prayer and renewal.

Healing was as costly for Jesus as it can be for us—in my experience it is not a matter of a once off, single time prayer muttered over someone. It takes time, attention and energy. To be involved in caring for others - to “minister” even if you think that may sound a bit high faultin - to attend to truly listen and be open to what you hear and to allow it to penetrate your thick outer shell so it churns you up inside. All this costs. There is a price to pay. It takes its toll. Something is depleted and some find there is only so many times it can be replenished from the well.

Despite the protests of exasperation Jesus insists upon greeting this woman face to face. In this new community Jesus is establishing there is no place for that raw naked power that we are told he sensed leaving him to be exercised, even for healing, outside of a relationship.

And when he meets her he pronounces, "Daughter/Woman your faith has made you well" and soon he will ask Jairus to have faith. Not so much her faith but it is Jesus who has made her well but faith is the coming with empty hands to receive. Faith not a thing that someone has or not but an openness; trust.

And for both the woman and the girl their healing comes through touch - Jairus asks Jesus to lay hands and the woman touches hem/fringe of garment. The story lingers on this point a number of times. Jairus pleads with Jesus to 'lay hands on' his daughter (Mark 5.23); when he comes Jesus does indeed 'take her by the hand' (Mark 5.41); the woman is determined to 'touch' Jesus' garment (Mark 5.27, 28); Jesus announces that he has been 'touched' (Mark 5.30) and the disciples marvel that he knows someone 'touched' him (Mark 5.31). Any Jew aware of the laws of purity would be alert to this language. Something beautifully personal and at the same time groundbreakingly subversive in the way people understand what is holy and what is unclean is at work here.

What unites Jairus and the woman, in their desperation is what I have at other times called, "compassion with grunt". Whatever it is it is the new element brought to a situation by the presence of Jesus, and by faith in him. It is the unexpected that breaks open an otherwise closed situation. It is what brought Jairus to his knees before Jesus, and hence led to the healing of his daughter. It is the woman throwing all cultural/religious norms out the window, and being healed. It is Jesus insisting on speaking to this woman in the face of protests of futility of ever finding her from the disciples. It is Jesus entering that house of death with the sounds of mocking laughter ringing in his ears. It is his confidence that the power to cleanse and restore is far greater than the power of sin and death to taint and destroy.

But first we acknowledge our desperate need.

Robert Capon has said, "Jesus came to raise the dead. The only qualification for the gift of the Gospel is to be dead. You do not have to be smart. You do not have to be good. You do not have to be wise. You do not have to be wonderful. You do not have to be anything...you just have to be dead. That's it."

What it looks like for you, and our community? This week look for the opportunities provided to you for compassion with grunt. You will find

**yourself in the presence of many people you may not otherwise notice,
and in the presence of Jesus.**

Girl raised from dead but Jesus says do not say anything!