

The Daughter of Jairus and the Woman with the Hemorrhage (5:21-43)

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again (in the boat) to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close to the sea. ²² One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus, came forward. Seeing him he fell at his feet ²³ and pleaded earnestly with him, saying, “My daughter is at the point of death. Please, come lay your hands on her that she may get well and live.” ²⁴ He went off with him, and a large crowd followed him and pressed upon him.

²⁵ There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. ²⁸ She said, “If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured.” ²⁹ Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. ³⁰ Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who has touched my clothes?” ³¹ But his disciples said to him, “You see how the crowd is pressing upon you, and yet you ask, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³ The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction.”

³⁵ While he was still speaking, people from the synagogue official’s house arrived and said, “Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any longer?” ³⁶ Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said to the synagogue official, “Do not be afraid; just have faith.” ³⁷ He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official, he caught sight of a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ So he went in and said to them, “Why this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep.” ⁴⁰ And they ridiculed him. Then he put them all out. He took along the child’s father and mother and those who were with him and entered the room where the child was. ⁴¹ He took the child by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise!” ⁴² The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked around. (At that) they were utterly astounded. ⁴³ He gave strict orders that no one should know this and said that she should be given something to eat.



Image credit: *The Daughter of Jairus (La fille de Zaïre)*, 1886-1896 | James Tissot | Brooklyn Museum, | PD-US

Context

Last week (the 12th Sunday in Year B) we heard Mark's account of Jesus on the stormy waters of the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41) during which Jesus calmed the seas with his word. Chapter 5 begins with Jesus and the disciples returning to Jewish land as they again cross the Sea of Galilee. In Mark, the lake represents literally and figuratively the boundary between Gentiles and Jews.

The lectionary moves into additional miracle accounts while skipping the story of the Gerasene demoniac. Our gospel selection includes a miracle within a miracle. They are the final two miracles of the "miracle section" of Mark (4:35-5:43), which includes four miracles and reactions to the miracles:

- Calming the storm at sea -- the disciples still have no faith (Mk 4:34-41)
- Casting a demon from a man and the subsequent desire of the locals that Jesus leave town even as the healed man becomes a witness (Mk 5:1-20)
- Raising Jairus' daughter – "*don't be afraid, only believe*" (Mk 5:21-24, 35-43)
- Healing the bleeding woman – her faith saved her (Mk 5:25-34)

In these miracles, Jesus exercises his power over nature (or the god/demon of chaos?), over the demonic army, over sickness, and over death. Another detail which connects several of the readings is the association of Jesus and uncleanness: the possessed man from the tombs (who is probably a Gentile), the flow of blood from the woman, and being in the presence of death all pull Jesus into the category of ceremonial uncleanness.

Ceremonial Cleanliness. These miracles have to be understood as within the framework of ceremonial cleanliness. What is clear is that both the woman and the girl were unclean. In Jewish thought uncleanness was infectious, a human being might incur it by contact with any unclean person or thing (Lev. 5:3); but the law regarded three forms of uncleanness as serious enough to exclude the infected person from society. These were leprosy, uncleanness caused by bodily discharges, and impurity resulting from contact with the dead (Num. 5:2-4). This is not a topic that is just being introduced in Mark 5. Recall the connection with the ending of Mark 4: the exorcism of the unclean spirits from the man living in the (unclean) tombs into the (unclean) pigs. Stoffregen writes that "All three characters in Mark 5 transfer their uncleanness to Jesus, and to each Jesus bestows the cleansing wholeness of God. Mark 5 might be called the 'St. Jude chapter' (the saint of hopeless causes), for the Gerasene demoniac, the hemorrhaging woman, and Jairus each find hope in Jesus when all human hopes are exhausted."

Structure. An interesting detail is how the healing of the woman with hemorrhages for 12 years is "sandwiched" between the full account of the healing of Jairus' daughter. Lane [189-90] notes that "The two incidents may have become associated in this way merely because there was an interruption to the journey which proved disastrous for the young girl. But it is possible that Mark saw more in this association: the healing of a woman who has lived with the impingement of death anticipates the healing of a girl who has actually experienced death. The structural device of intercalating one incident within another is paralleled by other instances in which Mark uses the device of anticipation. The detail with which Mark recalls the woman with the hemorrhage indicates that his concern extends beyond the mere passage of time. The healing experienced by the woman is itself a reversal of death and a pledge of the raising of Jairus' daughter."

Jesus and women: life and trust. The account of the healing of the woman and Jairus' daughter are part of a four-fold miracle narration in which Jesus has shown power over chaotic nature (4:35-41) and destructive demons (5:1-20), and now over debilitating illness and death itself.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus is closely involved with women nine times. Here in verses 21–43, Mark's

readers enter into two of Jesus' more moving encounters with women (Jairus' daughter and the woman with the hemorrhage). Both stories begin with someone seeking out Jesus, the healer. Both stories end in the cure of a person who had been hopelessly sick. Even the way Mark intertwines the two stories shows that Mark wants his readers to hear one important message common to both: *"Do not be afraid; just have faith."* (v. 36)! The father of the little girl trusts Jesus even after hearing the report that she is dead (vv. 35–40). He is invited to witness Jesus' healing touch and word, and then sees his little girl walking around alive (vv. 41–42). The woman shows her trust by touching Jesus (v. 27) and by coming forward in spite of her fear (v. 33). She learns that her faith is rewarded by peace and lasting health (v. 34). Like Jairus and the woman, Christians of every age are urged by Mark to approach Jesus confidently with earnest appeals on behalf of the sick and dying.

Even as he reports Jesus' miraculous power, Mark preserves the human side of Jesus. For example, the one who has more healing power than the physicians of his day (he cured the woman who had spent all her money and twelve years of time in going to doctors, who failed to help her, v. 26) did not know who touched him (v. 30). Likewise, the one who raises the little girl from her deathbed (v. 41) is also sensitive to her need for something to eat (v. 43). Such details make Mark's Jesus very approachable; he was perfectly human (he was full of compassion). Mark's readers can trust him now as those in need did when he walked on this earth. He is sensitive to the needs of those who seek him out.

It is important that Mark's readers notice the details in this passage that point to the climax of the Gospel. Such hints reveal Mark's desire to keep his readers moving with Jesus to the place where his journey leads. For example, Peter, James, and John, who witness the raising of the dead girl here, will soon question what "to rise from the dead" means (9:10). Likewise, the fearful, trembling woman with a hemorrhage points to the three women who will leave the empty tomb "seized with trembling and bewilderment," so afraid that they say nothing to anyone (16:8). There is almost no section of Mark's Gospel that does not draw his readers to its conclusion. Mark asks his readers, women and men, to stay with Jesus to the end. Even when life's confusion and tragedies get them down, Mark's readers are reminded: "Fear is useless. What is needed is trust in God, who brings life, even from death."

Detailed Comments

The Plea of Jairus.

"When Jesus had crossed again (in the boat) to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him..." Jesus is returning from his experience in Gentile territory and the casting out of a demon from a man in the Gerasene district. The transition to our text is simple and stated in one verse. Jesus returned to the western shore of the lake, perhaps to Capernaum and a multitude gathered around him, immediately upon his arrival, so it seems. No indication is given whether the crowd came together as soon as he arrived or after an extended period of time; it is simply the first fact that Mark records, offering a contrast to Jesus' experience on the eastern shore where the inhabitants urged him to depart.

Without a demarcation of time, the story quickly moves to focus on Jairus, identified as one of the synagogue officials. The word used here could indicate someone of the class of office holder or simply an elder member of the community. In either case, it is clear that Jairus is someone who is well known and respected. It is most likely that he was a lay official responsible for supervision of the building and arranging the religious service.

Jairus stands at the opposite end of the socioeconomic scale from the unnamed woman we will meet in the next section. His status as a synagogue official marks him out as a wealthy and influential member of the community. He would have been accustomed to having others request favors from him. One might expect such a person to send an emissary to ask Jesus to come and heal the little girl. The fact

that the father comes and throws himself at Jesus' feet begging for help shows that he is as desperate as the hemorrhaging woman.

Most commentators do not over-read Jairus' fall at Jesus' feet as a sign of worship. In Semitic languages one of the most respectful greetings translates as "I hold your feet." This is the sense of the word *piptō* used in the text.

It is not the greeting that is unusual, it is a part of the request. His request that Jesus should come and lay hands in healing upon his daughter reflects a common practice of the day. While this is the first mention of the laying on of hands in Mark, other references occur in 6:5; 7:32; 8:23, 25. What was unusual was his confidence that if Jesus would come, and as a result, his daughter's life would be saved. Is it an act of faith? An act of desperation by someone whose options are running out? Mark's narration at this point is too sparse to know more than Jesus went with him, followed by the crowd.

One can easily imagine a large crowd following Jesus, pressing in upon him (v.24). We are now prepared for the account of the woman who touched Jesus in order to be healed.

The Woman with the Hemorrhage

There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse.

It is most often assumed that the women suffered from some continued menstrual blood flow, however, that is just that, an assumption. The text is general and cites no source or cause for the hemorrhaging. That being said, whatever the source, such a woman was called a *zabah*, and came under the restrictions of Lev. 15:25–33. So important was the regulation of life for such a person that the Mishna tractate Zabim is devoted to this topic. The flow of blood would have left her ritually unclean and resulted in exclusion from society at large.

The One in Need of Healing. We are told that she had consulted a number of physicians, had endured a wide variety of treatments, and had spent all of her money in a desperate attempt to better her condition. Lane [190] reports One remedy consisted of drinking a goblet of wine containing a powder compounded from rubber, alum and garden crocuses. Another treatment consisted of a dose of Persian onions cooked in wine administered with the summons, "Arise out of your flow of blood!" Other physicians prescribed sudden shock, or the carrying of the ash of an ostrich's egg in a certain cloth.

All this was in vain; in fact, her condition grew worse. Her existence was wretched because she was in a constant state of uncleanness and would be generally shunned by people since contact with her rendered others unclean. None of these remedies had benefited the woman. Having heard reports of the healing power of Jesus, she determined her course of action. Despite her ritual uncleanness she entered the crowd behind him and reached out to his garment. The desire to touch Jesus' clothing likely reflects the popular belief that the dignity and power of a person are transferred to what he wears. This gesture depicts Jesus as a thaumaturge (a performer of miracles). Magical power flows from the charismatic healer to his clothing and anything that touches it. It is not possible to know the woman's state of mind with respect to such quasi-magical thinking about popular beliefs of touch and her state of faith when it came to the person of Jesus.

We do know that after her healing *She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth.* (v.33) Undoubtedly part of that "whole truth" was her conviction of the popular belief in the power of touch, yet also may have included her knowledge that others had touched him and been made well (3:10; 6:56). We also know that, whatever her intentions, when she touched Jesus' cloak she experienced the cessation of her hemorrhage, and knew that she had been healed. "*Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction*"

The Healer. *Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who has touched my clothes?”*

In the stories, Jesus shows himself aware of the inner thoughts and motives of his opponents, yet in the very same moment of healing, Jesus realized that “*power had gone out from him*” and seems unaware of the woman at all. This is an unusual expression which occurs only in Mark’s Gospel. We are perhaps surprised that Jesus seems to be caught unaware and that this power is not under his conscious control. The idea of *dynamis* (power) is intrinsic and constitutional in the biblical concept of the personal God. As Lane [192-3] notes: “Jesus possesses the power of God as the representative of the Father. Nevertheless, the Father remains in control of his own power. The healing of the woman occurred through God’s free and gracious decision to bestow upon her the power which was active in Jesus. By an act of sovereign will God determined to honor the woman’s faith in spite of the fact that it was tinged with ideas which bordered on magic.”

Jesus’ question “*Who has touched my clothes?*” might be simply the reaction to a moment that took him by surprise. The question seems pointless to the disciples since he had been jostled and touched by any number of people. It may well be that the disciples are trying to “keep Jesus on task” since the immediate mission was to assist Jairus’ daughter who was dying – any delay could prove fatal.

Or the question might be far more important than simply mortal death. What is different about this encounter is that the power went out from Jesus. Certainly lots of people touched Jesus, yet not every contact resulted in an outflow of divine power and healing. It was not a unilateral event under the control and decision of the woman only – there is something more: an encounter of a personal nature. If the question is left unanswered, then the woman may well leave the encounter believing in the quasi-magical efficacy of touching famous and noteworthy people. In asking the question, Jesus is seeking to find the one who touched him with an expectation of salvation – immortal life. Her faith needs to be identified as the real source of her healing (v.34). In the meantime the disciples continue to be unaware of Jesus’ real power.

Fear and Peace. *The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction.”*

Why would the woman approach in “*fear and trembling?*” Perkins [588] provides a wonderful explanation that I will simply offer in whole:

The woman’s fear at being discovered suggests the magical view of such healing powers. She might be accused of stealing what belongs to the healer without appropriate supplication (or payment)!²¹³ Other interpreters suggest that her fear stems from the possible accusation of ritual contamination. Purification legislation from Qumran equates women with a flux of blood and males with a genital discharge. After the discharge stops, a seven-day purification period, followed by laundering clothing, is required before those who touch such a person are free from that contamination. Readers know that Jesus was not concerned about the problems of ritual contamination, since he had touched the leper (1:41), and the woman is said to be familiar with Jesus’ reputation. Therefore, ritual impurity does not appear to be the primary focus of Mark’s narrative. Unlike the story of the leper’s healing, Jesus does not instruct the woman to observe the required period of purification.

The exchange between Jesus and the woman removes any suggestion that Jesus’ clothes were endowed with magical power, nor does Jesus condemn her for attempted “theft” of his power. Jesus does not possess a magic force that accounts for his ability to heal. Instead, healing reflects the presence of God’s saving power (Deut 32:39; Isa 35:4–6; 53:4–5; Hos 11:3; Mal 4:1–3),²¹⁵ and Jesus’ saving and healing presence demonstrates that the kingdom of God is

near. The woman's gesture of pushing through the crowd to touch Jesus' garment resembles the faith exhibited by those who brought the paralytic to Jesus (2:5a). Jesus points to the woman's faith as the real agent of healing and pronounces the cure permanent (v. 34).

The fear the woman exhibits as she responds to Jesus' question stems from her knowledge of what has happened to her (v. 33). In other words, she recognizes the extraordinary divine power possessed by Jesus. Fear and trembling are common responses to the presence of the divine. The disciples were "filled with a great fear" after Jesus calmed the storm (4:41). In that situation, they were accused of having no faith (4:40). Likewise, the Gerasenes were so afraid of Jesus' powers that they asked him to leave their country (5:15–17). Jesus addresses the woman as "daughter," suggesting that she now has a personal relationship to Jesus as one of his family (3:35). (Some see his form of addressing her as an indication of the difference in social status between the two, although it appears to narrow the gap exhibited by the woman's falling at Jesus' feet.) The term may have been introduced when this story was combined with the cure of Jairus's daughter (v. 35). It carries more personal overtones than would the term "woman," which had been used for her in the rest of the story.

Daughter. At their core, the concerns and dynamics surrounding ritual uncleanness, especially leprosy, bodily discharge, or touching corpses, were about relationships. They put one outside of the community. When Jesus calls the woman who touched him "daughter," he establishes a relationship with one with whom he should not have a relationship. Her illness made her unclean. Her attempts to be healed by doctors made her impoverished. Her brazen invasion of Jesus' space, touching Jesus' clothes, "technically" made Jesus' unclean and could have resulted in him condemning her. Yet by calling her "daughter," he established the same kind of relationship with her as Jairus has with his "daughter." He would do anything possible to save his daughter.

Jesus addressing the woman as "daughter," suggests that she now has a personal relationship to Jesus as one of his family (3:35). She is one who does the will of God. Stoffregen writes: "The persistence of Jesus in discovering who touched him rivals the woman's persistence in reaching Jesus. She wants a cure, whereas Jesus desires a personal encounter with someone. He is not content to dispatch a miracle; he wants to encounter a person. In the kingdom of God, miracles lead to meeting. Discipleship is not simply getting our needs met; it is being in the presence of Jesus, being known by him, and following him. ... In a way the woman cannot yet know, the desire for healing and wholeness is the desire for Jesus."

The final words spoken to the woman, "*Go in peace,*" while a traditional leave-taking, are here informed by her entire experience. The peace with which she departed signified more than release from agitation over a wretched existence or from fear of recrimination for having touched Jesus. It was the profound experience of well-being which is related to salvation from God. When Jesus declares, "*be cured of your affliction,*" he confirms that her healing was permanent and affirms his active participation with the Father's will to honor the woman's faith.

The woman had experienced an aspect of salvation in anticipation of the more radical healing to be experienced by the daughter of Jairus.

The Raising of Jairus' Daughter: the Subduing of Death

While he was still speaking, people from the synagogue official's house arrived and said, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any longer?" Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid; just have faith." (Mark 5:35-43)

The interruption of attending to the hemorrhaging women creates a time delay in the narrative, providing space for the girl to die, messengers to report to the father, and mourners to gather at the house (vv. 35, 38). The messengers present an obstacle to the healing by advising the father to leave Jesus alone, since the girl has died. Jesus takes the initiative by telling Jairus to have faith (v. 36). The reference to faith picks up the conclusion to the healing of the woman.

Jairus had exercised faith when he came to Jesus in the confidence that he could save his daughter. He had witnessed the healing of the woman which demonstrated the relationship between faith and divine help. But he was now asked to believe that his child would live even as he stood in the presence of death. Such faith is radical trust in the ability of Jesus to confront a crisis situation with the power of God.

Jesus did not allow the crowds or even many disciples to accompany him to the house of Jairus. The disciples that did accompany Jesus were Peter, James, and John. The three disciples who accompany him will serve as an inner group at the transfiguration (9:2) and in Gethsemane (14:33). This limitation of witnesses echoes two OT scenes: (1) Elijah's taking the widow's son apart to his own chamber when he restores the boy's life (1 Kgs 17:17–24) and (2) Elisha and his servant's going into the room alone to restore life to the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kgs 4:32–37).

When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official, he caught sight of a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. So he went in and said to them, "Why this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep." And they ridiculed him.

Arriving at the house Jesus saw that preparations had been made already for the funeral. The minstrels and professional mourners were performing their duties as the first part of the mourning ceremony. The wailing consisted of choral or antiphonal songs accompanied by hand clapping. Since even the poorest man was required by common custom to hire a minimum of two flute players and one professional mourner in the event of his wife's death, it is probable that one who held the rank of synagogue-leader would be expected to hire a large number of professional mourners.

When Jesus and those with him arrive at the house, the mourners laugh at his claim that the girl is not dead (vv. 38–40). However, their response assures readers that the girl is indeed dead. Funeral rites have already begun. As in the lengthy account of the woman's illness, the mourners' skepticism shows the reader how extraordinary Jesus' powers really are. He will overcome death, not a mistaken diagnosis.

Jesus rebuked their noisy tumult and declared, "*the child is not dead, but asleep.*" In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' statement is ambiguous, and could allow the interpretation that the girl was in a state of very deep unconsciousness that is to be distinguished from death itself. (In the Gospel of Luke there is no ambiguity; Luke clearly speaks of resuscitation. It is probable that Mark intended his account to be understood in the same way. Jesus' statement means that in spite of the girl's real death, she has not been delivered over to the realm of death with all of its consequences. Mourning is inappropriate because she experiences a sleep from which she will soon awake.

The mourners, professionals that they were, disagree with Jesus' assessment and ridicule his words. It is interesting how quickly wailing and tears are exchanged for laughter. Jesus cast the scoffers out of the house, and allowing only the parents of the girl and his three disciples to accompany him, entered the room where the young girl lay.

He took the child by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" The girl rose up and walked about. The unpreparedness of the parents and the disciples for what they had witnessed is expressed with emphatic language. There was, apparently, no doubt in their

minds that they had stood in the presence of death. God had intervened so dramatically they were left speechless with utter amazement.

Mark records that Jesus strictly charged those present not to disclose to others what had happened. This injunction to silence has attracted particular attention, for it is alleged to be impracticable. It was widely known that the girl had died; it would be impossible to keep her in isolation for an extended period of time. Accordingly, scholars have found in 5:43 strong confirmation that the secrecy phenomena in the Gospel is a theological construction for which Mark himself is responsible.

Lane [199] holds that this particular context lends no support to the theory of secret messiahship. “Fundamental to the narrative is the remarkable disclosure of Jesus’ authority made to the parents of the girl and the disciples. These five received the privilege of a special revelation which they were not to share with others. The secret is, accordingly, “a witnessed secret” which is to be kept from others whom Jesus had excluded. The accent of the narrative alternates between disclosure of the messiahship and veiling. Special motivation for the injunction to silence may be found in the rank unbelief of those who had ridiculed Jesus with their scornful laughter. It is clear throughout Mark that Jesus revealed his messiahship only with reserve. It is appropriate to this consistent pattern of behavior that he was unwilling to make himself known to the raucous, unbelieving group that had gathered outside Jairus’ house. He did not permit them to witness the saving action by which the girl was restored to her parents, and he directed that it should continue to remain unknown to those outside. He recognized that the responsibility of the parents in this regard could not continue indefinitely. When the child appeared in public the facts would speak for themselves. The parents could, however, withhold what had happened and thus fulfill the intention of Jesus. Before it was known that the girl was yet alive, the purpose for which the charge had been given would have been fulfilled; Jesus would have departed and could no longer be subject to ostentatious acclaim.”

There is a fine human touch in Mark’s final note, that in the midst of the excitement and confusion Jesus realized that the girl would need food.

The resuscitation of Jairus’ daughter is both a deed of compassion and a pledge of the conquering power of Jesus over the combined forces of death and unbelief, in which the Kingdom of God was disclosed as a saving reality. It is precisely in deliverance from death that the salvation which Jesus brings finds its most pointed expression.

A Final Reflection

Perkins [590-91], as usual, offers a very interesting reflection on the passage.

1. The story of a nameless woman who has exhausted her resources seeking medical treatment for a chronic condition strikes a responsive chord with many older adults today. When they were younger, doctors seemed able to provide cures. Now these persons seem to have an ever-expanding list of medical complaints. As one man in his seventies put it, “After a certain age, you are never really well. Just less sick.” The financial drain and emotional difficulty of dealing with the bureaucratic, impersonal, and compartmentalized medical establishment compound the difficulty.
2. While the woman is a hero of persistence and faith, Jesus and the disciples appear to represent negative experiences associated with visits to the doctor: impersonal and sometimes crowded waiting rooms; the sense that the doctor wants to get the patient out of the way, and the dismay when the patient does not respond to treatment as anticipated. Jesus at first appears to condemn the woman rather than celebrate her healing. The strong affirmation he gives to her faith at the end of the story alleviates the apparent harshness in the search for the woman. Jesus does not take the credit for making her well but points to her faith as the real source of healing.

3. Every parent with a seriously ill child can identify with Jairus. Parents find it more painful to entrust a young child to the hospital knowing that the youngster is about to undergo a risky or lengthy surgical procedure than to undergo similar treatment themselves. Parents and other family members feel the burden of reassuring the child that the doctors will make him or her all better, even when they know that the prognosis is not good. Stories like this one seem to promise too much. For every family whose child makes a complete recovery from major surgery or life-threatening illness, there is another family whose child dies. Where is faith and healing in that situation?

Faith and healing come after the fact, as families learn to remember with gratitude the child they have lost. The mourners who mock Jesus in the story may not have believed that the little girl had any future. Some interpreters have suggested that since the verb for “rise up” (ἐγείρω *egeirō*) used here is also used for the resurrection, this story contains a message about resurrection for Christian readers. Jesus cares for the girl just as much, whether she returns to earthly life or passes to life with God after death.

Those interpreters who think that the command to silence points toward the cross remind us that faith acknowledges that the crucified is the Son of God. Christians do not base their faith in Christ on miracles.

NOTES

5:21 a large crowd gathered...close to the sea. This echoes Mk 4:1 and links these events to its predecessor events, also on Jewish soil, also on the shoreline. This is a location where key Markan events occur (e.g. 1:16-20, the call of the disciples; 2:13-15, the call of Levi; 4:1-34, the parable discourses.)

5:22 one of the synagogue officials. Jairus was a key figure at the synagogue who helped to direct the worship services and operate the building. A local synagogue could have more than one leader (Acts 13:15). This is one of the few scenes in Mark in which a Jewish leader was responsive to Jesus. **Mark 5: 22 synagogue officials:** the word used here could indicate someone of the class of office holder or simply an elder member of the community. In either case, it is clear that Jairus is someone who is well known and respected. **Jairus:** This is perhaps a Hellenized name Jair, one of the judges of Israel (Judges 10:3-5). **fell at his feet.** This prostration (*piptō*) indicated respect for Jesus; the Syro-Phoenician woman will later do the same (7:25).

5:23 pleaded earnestly. The Greek *parakalein* is characteristic of a prayer for healing. **lay your hands on her.** This language is typical for blessing (Acts 8:19), consecration (Lev 8:10), and healing (2 Kgs 4:34; Mk 16:18; and Acts 9:12, 28:8)

5:25 hemorrhages. This is lit. “a flow of blood,” a euphemistic reference to vaginal bleeding. It made the woman ceremonially unclean (the language matches Lev 15:19, 25–30) thus prohibiting her from marital relations and to some degree restricting a normal social life. Key Jewish texts for this condition include 11QTemple 45:7–17, 46:16–18, 48:14–17; Josephus *Antiquities* 3.261; and *m. Niddah*. The unclean woman’s social position and status were exactly opposite to those of Jairus. Jesus ministered to the whole gamut of society.

It is interesting to note that Jairus’ daughter is dying at age 12, the standard betrothal age, just before she is to marry and bring life into the world. The unnamed woman is suffering from a condition that prevents her from bringing life into the world – for 12 years. Thus, Jesus healing, also opens the avenue for each of the women to bring new life into the world.

5:27 touched his cloak. There was an ancient belief that a person’s power could be conducted by his or

her clothes (see 3:10; 6:56; Acts 19:12).

5:28 *If I can just touch his clothes.* This is expressed as a pure hope with no presumption as to its likelihood. However, her willingness to violate the rules governing uncleanness showed her determination.

5:29 *the flow of blood dried up.* Lit., “the well of her blood was dried up.” The language reflects Lev 12:7, LXX, where the rite of cleanliness is described. The woman was restored.

her affliction. Her condition is described very graphically in Greek as an affliction, a scourge or “whipping” that had been removed.

5:30 *healing power had gone out from him.* Jesus knew that someone had touched him. As one who possessed healing power and transcended any defilement that normally would result from such contact, Jesus now made public what the woman had naturally hoped would remain private.

5:31 *‘Who touched me?’* The disciples were amazed that Jesus would ask such a question. The crowd was so tight around him that numerous people were touching him. Jesus, however, knew the difference between casual contact and what had taken place. God had acted graciously in healing this woman and she needed to understand that.

5:32 *who had done it.* This expression is feminine (“the woman who had done this”), indicating that either Jesus or the narrator knew that this was a woman. A narrative comment to that effect seems superfluous as the story makes this clear, so there is a hint here that Jesus was aware of who it was. Jesus sought her out for her sake, not his own.

5:33 *fell down ... and told him what she had done.* Jesus’ question elicited the woman’s public testimony. She was trembling because she had not been able to be healed anonymously. Would he be angry that she had made him unclean? She told “the whole truth” (so the Greek) of what she had done and Jesus reassured her that all was well. She learned that what had taken place was not simply an ancient form of magic.

Mark 5:34 *daughter:* Later tradition embellished the Gospel account, seeking to answer the questions asked by generations of people. In the Greek tradition the anonymous woman was given the name Berenice, while in the Coptic and Latin tradition she received the related name Veronica. Eusebius states that she was from Caesarea Philippi, and that by the door of her home there was erected on a high stone a copper statue of a woman kneeling, her hands outstretched before her, entreating one purported to resemble Jesus. At the feet of the male figure a “strange sort of herb” is said to grow on the column which possessed medicinal powers against a wide variety of diseases.

Mark 5:35 *Your daughter has died.* In the messengers’ view, she had died and it was too late to help her now. Jesus should be sent on his way. The faith of Jairus was put to a twofold test: (1) that his daughter might be cured and, now that she had died, (2) that she might be restored to life. His faith contrasts with the lack of faith of the crowd.

Mark 5:37 *except Peter, James, and John.* This is one of a handful of events, such as the Transfiguration, the Olivet discourse, and Gethsemane, where only the inner circle of the Twelve observed what took place. Crowds and mourners (Mark 5:40) were excluded. Luke 8:51 notes that the parents were also there.

Mark 5:38 *a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.* This is one of the clear indications that the girl had died. Mourners were customary in Judaism, although whether these were professional mourners or just friends and neighbors is not clear in Mark.

Mark 5:39 *but asleep.* This is a frequent euphemism that indicates that death is not permanent. It

appears elsewhere in the NT with this meaning (see Matthew 27:52; John 11:11; 1 Cor 15:5; 1 Thes 4:13–15; 1 Thess 5:10 using the same verb, *katheudō*; see also Dan 12:7, LXX and Ps 87:6, LXX). *Genesis Rabbah* 17.5 associates sleep with incomplete death. Jesus may be alluding to such an idea as he declares her not to be dead. Jesus knew that the girl would not remain dead; rather, her situation was more like a person taking a nap.

Mark 5:40 ridiculed him. The crowd viewed Jesus' claim that the girl was not permanently dead as ridiculous. In their view, Jesus either misunderstood the tragic situation or he was being inane.

Mark 5:41 *Talitha koum.* Lit., “little lamb, arise.” Mark often uses Aramaic expressions directly and then explains them (3:17; 7:11, 34; 11:9–10; 14:36; 1 Mark 5:22, 34; Taylor 1966:296). Here it is Jesus' call for the girl to come back to life. As Mark 5:42 indicates, she “arose” and “continued walking.” This miraculous resuscitation had precedent (cf. Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:17–23 and Elisha in 2 Kgs 4:18–37). **arise:** Lit., “wake from sleep.” the Greek verb *egeirein*, used here, is the verb generally used to express resurrection from death (Mark 6:14,16; Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:14) and Jesus' own resurrection (Mark 16:6; Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:6).

The retention of Aramaic formulae in Marcan healing contexts (Chs. Mark 5:41; 7:34) has led to the conjecture that, analogous to pagan custom, the early Christians commonly believed in the efficacy of esoteric utterances composed of foreign or incomprehensible words. There is no support for this proposal either in Mark or in the subsequent tradition. The evangelist retains Aramaic with translation in other contexts unrelated to healing. Moreover, there is no evidence that “*Talitha cumi*” or “*Ephphatha*” were ever used by Christian healers as a magic spell. Their presence in the narrative reflects a faithfulness to the tradition that Jesus had actually spoken these words on specific occasions.

Mark 5:42 utterly astounded. This term (*ekstasis*) is rare in the synoptic Gospels, appearing only here, in Mark 16:8, and in Luke Mark 5:26. It is used only in the context of miracles.

Mark 5:43 strict orders that no one should know this. Once again, Jesus restricted the discussion of this miracle.

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