

"Jairus and the Woman with the Issue of Blood"

Mark 5:21-43

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Thirty-five years ago, I had the privilege to visit Israel and tour the Holy Lands. One sunny morning, we left Tiberias by boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee. As we pulled up to the dock, among the hedges and eucalyptus trees we encountered the remains of an ancient white temple. There was not much more than four columns left standing, a paved court, a doorway that led nowhere, and the usual chaos of broken pillars and fallen stones. They were the ruins of Capernaum's synagogue, the same synagogue that the Roman Centurion built whose slave Jesus healed, the SAME synagogue that one Jairus was an important leader of.

Strolling among those ruins, I could imagine a large crowd of spectators gathered at the shore greeting Jesus upon his return from the other side of the lake. Only days earlier he had healed the Centurion's servant who lay near death and the day before, he had cast out a legion of demons from a crazed young man. Jesus was developing the reputation of being a wonder worker and the crowds were anxious to see what new miracle he would perform next.

As Jesus got out of the boat, a well-dressed man charged through the center of the crowd desperately seeking his help. Of course, the people of Capernaum knew him well- it was Jairus, the president of the local synagogue and a wealthy and influential person in the town. To the surprise of everyone, he threw himself down before Jesus and begged that he might come and possibly do one MORE miracle- for his twelve year-old daughter who presently lay dying. Seeing the fear and desperation in his face, Jesus COULDN'T say "no" and, without a word, he was off to the man's home to do what only HE could for her.

Jairus hadn't come because he was a man of great faith; he came because he was frantically desperate for ANYTHING this supposed healer could do for him. Probably informed by the doctors that her condition was hopeless, Jairus now looked to Jesus as her last chance. As a rich, powerful, and respected member of the same religious order which now labeled Jesus a heretic and a trouble maker, it must have been hard for this Pharisee and ruler of the synagogue to have to appeal to CHRIST of all people- one who had every bit the appearance of a poor, itinerant, and untrained teacher. But out of love for his daughter--whom he loved more than all his wealth, status, and privilege combined--he would readily sacrifice his pride even if it meant having to embarrass himself and beg for this unorthodox preacher's help before the entire town.

Seeing the urgency in the man's plea, our Lord immediately set out for Jairus's home. With Jesus, the ONLY introduction he ever required was to sense a person's need and nothing more. But then while wending their way through the crowd, Jesus suddenly stopped. In the crush of all those people, a single hand had reached out and touched, of all things, the hem of his garment. "Who touched me?" he asked. Of course, among the crushing throng, MANY were touching him, but there was one person in particular whose slight contact with his tunic instantly

alerted him to some pressing need. Turning around, he spied the fearful face of a small woman whom we are told had suffered from a menstruation problem for twelve years, a health issue which under Jewish law had rendered her defiled and unclean. Having sought healing throughout the years, she exhausted every possible avenue of help but her condition had only worsened. With every last cent in her savings gone, she had nothing left and nowhere to turn. Like Jairus, she TOO was a person in need of a miracle; like so many others, she was someone else looking to Jesus as HER last and only hope.

But the woman's problem wasn't just PHYSICAL- it was also RELIGIOUS and one that bore great SOCIAL implications as well. According to Leviticus 15, to be deemed "unclean" meant that the person was not allowed to take part in any religious proceedings. She could not go to the temple, could not touch other persons, and had to be kept separated from her husband and the rest of her family. FURTHERMORE, anything she TOUCHED--including her bed, her clothing, and her furniture--were considered defiled so that if any OTHER person came into contact with these things, then HE or SHE was deemed unclean AS WELL. Therefore, such individuals were considered OUTCASTS- segregated from their home, their family, their friends, their community, and their livelihood until declared healed of their condition. It was the same for persons afflicted with leprosy AND EVEN THOSE WHO CAME INTO CONTACT WITH A DEAD BODY. Thus, she had spent the past twelve years of her life alone except for the company of OTHER outcasts. And so our text actually involves TWO persons who were "dead" and in need of resurrection- a young girl who was PHYSICALLY dead, and an older woman who for all intents and purposes had died in an EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, and RELIGIOUS sense.

Although she knew it was wrong, like Jairus, her desperation was far greater than any embarrassment or fear she could possibly have of being discovered. No doubt, she thought that among such a large crowd she would never be found out, that her touch would never be detected- but she was wrong. When Jesus stopped, turned around, and then focused his gaze directly at HER, she knew she'd been exposed; she was fully aware of the consequences her action could bring upon herself. Under Jewish law, by reaching out and touching Jesus, she had in effect contaminated him. The slightest touch--EVEN TO THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT--meant that he was now every bit as defiled as SHE was. Like her, Jesus would have to be declared unclean ALSO; like her, he TOO would have to be segregated from his family and community until ceremonially restored by the religious leaders in strict accordance to the Mosaic Law.

For such a flagrant transgression, under that SAME Law, she now faced the ULTIMATE penalty of death by stoning. Jesus could very well have demanded that she now DIE for what the Jewish authorities considered to be a "high crime." And so, in fear and trembling, she threw herself down before Jesus, confessed what she had done, and began to beg for his forgiveness. But before she can even get the entire sentence out of her mouth, Jesus says to her for everyone to hear, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." Here, Jesus had not only EXONERATED her, he HEALED her of her affliction and thus restored her to a life filled with the same love and joy and family pleasures she once knew.

Interestingly enough, this is the only place in all the gospels where Jesus directly

addresses another person as “daughter.” This poor, lonely, social outcast suddenly found herself in an entirely NEW, life-transforming relationship with her NEW-FOUND Lord. She was now a “daughter of God,” a member of Christ’s own family, and not just for the remainder of her life but for the rest of ETERNITY. But then, this is what faith does- it takes persons who feel lost, lonely, unloved, and even DEAD and brings them into the closest possible relationship with One who promises to never leave or forsake them, even when they depart from this life.

But that’s not the end of the story; there’s still ANOTHER drama going on here. While Jesus was speaking with her, word had arrived from the house that Jairus’s young daughter had died. “Why trouble the Teacher any further,” he is told. Literally translated from the Greek, he is instructed to “stop flaying or tearing off the skin” of the teacher. In other words, the entire time Jesus was ministering to this woman, Jairus had been impatiently pulling at our Lord’s arm, imploring him, “Hurry up, Jesus! PLEASE! My daughter is near death. Time is of the essence! Don’t stop to speak with this woman of no account- don’t you see that MY need is far more critical than her small trouble. What can be more important than my dying child!”

After attending to the woman’s need, he continued on with Jairus to his home. When they arrived, it was already crowded with friends and professional mourners who had come to offer their sympathy. This was when he made the unbelievable statement, “Weep no more; she is not dead: she is asleep.” Knowing the difference between a sleeping person and a dead one, they started to laugh at the ridiculousness of such an assertion, thinking Jesus is mad.

Jesus immediately ordered everyone out of the house except for Peter, James, and John and the girl’s parents. Entering the room where the daughter lay, he bowed his head and offered up a prayer. Then, taking the dead girl’s hand (an act which according to their religious tradition would have rendered him defiled and unclean every bit as having come into contact with a leper or a hemorrhaging woman), he said to her “Talitha cumi” which is Aramaic for “Little girl, I say unto you, arise.” To the amazement of everyone, she immediately opened her eyes, got up, and walked. Then Jesus strictly forbade them to tell no one of this and then instructed that they give her something to eat.

Well that’s the story- a tale within a tale. Looking at these two central characters, Jairus and this woman could not have been any more different. TO BEGIN WITH, we are given Jairus’s name, an indication he was a man of considerable importance, while the woman remains ANONYMOUS- she appears and then disappears just as quickly, never to be heard from again. Thus the text tells us more about her SITUATION and CONDITION than it does anything about her IDENTITY. SECONDLY, he is rich while her lack of medical insurance has exhausted all her savings leaving her totally impoverished. THIRDLY, while Jairus was a man of distinction and honor, the woman was defiled and had no honor. FOURTHLY, by virtue of his status and position, he could boldly approach Jesus and brazenly ask for his help. SHE, on the other hand, had to remain hidden by the crowd while quietly and surreptitiously approaching Jesus from behind. Though the gulf between the two couldn’t have been any wider, what they DID have in common was that they BOTH had heard of Jesus, BOTH had found themselves desperately in need of a healing, and BOTH had run completely out of options.

What we learn here is that to Jesus, the need of this poor and anonymous social outcast

with her hemorrhaging condition was EVERY BIT AS IMPORTANT as the dying daughter of a rich and important social leader. Though she was SMALL, though she was POOR, though she was ANONYMOUS, and though she was a WOMAN, SHE had needs and rights that were every bit as REAL and LEGITIMATE as JAIRUS'S were. God is no respecter of persons and draws no distinction between rich and poor, strong or weak, male or female. FAITH is the only letter of introduction ever required to grab his attention- no matter how GREAT or how SMALL the problem. We are assured here that if we humbly approach Christ in an attitude of faith, he will ALWAYS take time to respond to our pleas.

Remarkably, we don't see much of what we would typically describe as "faith" in EITHER of these accounts. Neither Jairus nor this woman seem to know anything about Jesus other than that he had the reputation of being a healer; neither of them were seeking any kind of personal relationship with him, nor did they seem interested in whatever message he had to bring. They were merely two desperate individuals looking for healing- Jairus for his daughter and the unnamed woman for herself. What this underscores is how Jesus doesn't require great faith before he responds to someone's need. Consider that the woman in question did nothing more than BRUSH AGAINST the hem of his garment; that was ALL it took—a light touch--for her to get Christ's attention and nothing more! He simply meets people where they are and then demonstrates pure and unconditional love towards them. What's more, he was NEVER concerned about becoming defiled himself, whether by being touched by an unclean woman or by reaching out and touching the unclean body of a dead little girl. This is because love is ALWAYS more concerned about the other person than oneself, more interested in restoring persons to healthy and productive relationships than in empty rules and meaningless laws.

Friends, whether you realize it or not, we find OURSELVES united with Jairus and that anonymous woman this very morning. There was a time when we TOO found OURSELVES in desperate need of a healing with nowhere else to turn; each of US--just like them--suffered from a disease of sorts- whether it was a disease of UNRELENTING GUILT that filled us with intense self-loathing; a disease of ANGER AND HATRED that made us distrustful of all relationships; a disease of SELFISHNESS AND CONCEIT that caused us to think or care about no one else but ourselves; a disease of FEAR AND LONELINESS which led us to proceed through life continually apprehensive and afraid; or a disease of WORRY AND DESPAIR that drained from us any of the joy in life we once may have had. But just as there was good news for Jairus and that unnamed woman, there was also good news FOR US for just as Jesus spoke to them the words "I say unto you, arise!" and "My daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease," so were those very SAME words declared unto US. As a result, we TOO became NEW persons with TRANSFORMED lives, persons who subsequently enjoyed an altogether NEW relationship- and not just to our Lord and our God, but to EACH OTHER, as well! However, where Jesus exhorted them to tell no one, WE were instructed to tell THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD of this grace we received and the person we received it from!

Now if we were to take this account and through time travel, transport those two characters into the present, that poor woman with the medical condition could easily be representative of a young black man who, though minding his own business, has wandered into the "wrong" section of town and is sternly warned to get back to where he belongs "if he knows

what's good for him." For Trayvon Martin, being in the wrong place at the wrong time a couple of years ago cost him his LIFE. Or it could be some gay or transgendered man or woman who for years has been made to feel shameful and dirty by his family or even her CHURCH and is now close to the brink of committing suicide; or she could be a young Muslim family who's arrived in America to make a new life for themselves, but rather than warmly welcomed, they're viewed suspiciously and treated as dangerous aliens by their supposed "Christian" neighbors- and this just THREE examples of persons made to feel small and inconsequential, that is, as NON-persons in this world. I believe that scripture INTENTIONALLY gave that poor, anonymous woman no name because it wanted her to represent ANY AND ALL who may feel marginalized or ostracized or unfairly discriminated against or treated as some kind of outcast. Well the "good news" for us this morning is that AS SHE was declared a "daughter" by Jesus Christ, so is EVERY man, woman, or child who has ever been treated in such a fashion- a "son" and a "daughter" of JESUS CHRIST and thus A BELOVED CHILD OF GOD, cherished and accepted for all eternity!

In closing, some of you may remember that old-time faith healer Oral Roberts. For years, he had a popular television show on Sunday mornings which millions of people tuned into to hear testimonies about God's wonder-working power, many of whom were looking and hoping for their OWN promise of a healing. Well, his theme song for the show was called "Something Good Is Going To Happen To You" and the last stanza went like this:

*My friend if you're listening now humbly to me
Yes this is the moment that you can be free
This very same Jesus is right here today;
Release your faith and touch Him, then believe me when I say.*

And then came the chorus:

*Something good is going to happen to you
Happen to you this very day.
Something good is going to happen to you
Jesus of Nazareth is passing your way.*

Well, regardless of what you may have thought of Oral Roberts himself or his show, the PROMISE contained in those lyrics has ever remained the same. You see, as Jesus walked through the center of Capernaum two thousand years ago, he strides down the center aisle of this church and passes between these same pews THIS VERY MORNING. And as we learned from our message, whether burdened with worries or concerns, with afflictions or needs, we CAN reach out to him without the slightest bit of trepidation. We don't have to yell for him, we don't have to beg him, and nor do we have to first prove our faith before he'll act. All that is required is that we reach out and touch ever so slightly the hem of his cloak for that is all faith really IS- directing our needs and cares and concerns in the direction of Christ and then letting him do the rest. Be assured, he will never ignore us and keep on walking but will ALWAYS stop, ALWAYS take the time to hear our complaint. He will dry our tears and then offer us the healing we need--no matter how large or how small--such is his love for us. Believe it, my

friends, and you will discover just as the song promises, “Something GOOD is going to happen to YOU, THIS VERY DAY!” Let us pray...

Gracious God, you have purposely showed us this morning a study in contrasts, the juxtaposition of two lives who couldn't have been any more different- one, a wealthy, powerful and popular religious leader from the upper class, and a poor, powerless, outcast of a woman who's so insignificant that we're not even given her name; their lives and needs could not have been more different. Yet they both shared something in common- they were both persons in desperate need of a miracle and they didn't care HOW they'd get it.

Lord, the fact is that they are US, and regardless of how much money we have or the position we hold, you love us all equally; there is no impartiality in you. What's more, you will go to every length to meet us at the point of our deepest need because your love for us remains unlimited and unconditional. And having received such love and grace from your hands, help us then to address and ameliorate the needs of others that we may show the SAME love that Jesus did and prove that we are INDEED his disciples. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.