

Mark 5:21-43

Today we have a theme of healing...and today lines up perfectly with our healing service today!

So in today's gospel we have an excited crowd meeting Jesus on his return trip to Capernaum right after he just healed a demoniac across the Sea of Galilee at the Decapolis...the gentile side of the lake.

Jesus' fame is now spreading throughout the areas and people are coming out in mass to see this miracle-worker in action.

And one of Mark's favorite things to do in his gospel is to juxtapose or nest two stories together in relationship with one another.

Here we have two stories doing just that ...a young girl and a persistent woman...a story within a story.

Now both victims are female and are unnamed...and both are "daughters" aren't they?

Both were unclean according to Jewish laws...as one is bleeding and the other is dead upon Jesus' arrival...although she was probably ill in some way prior...and being unclean regardless will leave you socially isolated.

Both are attached to the number 12... one suffering for 12 years while the child has only been on the earth for 12 years.

In the Hebrew Torah, the number 12 has several meanings. The 12 tribes of Israel, or the 12 Apostles in the New Testament. Mystically we have 12 months in a year, and the 12 signs of the zodiac or the heavens as they knew it.

There is no definitive answer cause the Bible does not specifically state what the number 12 stands for. However, some believe that the number 12 symbolizes completeness or perfection...That number 12 may also symbolize God's divine kingdom.

Now both victims are of no consequence... and both victims are powerless in their culture...a woman and a child.

Both are healed by touch one initiated by the older woman and one initiated by Jesus...So it seems this Jesus can heal even when he doesn't initiate it or even intend to.

...and both are in fact healed...both women are restored and reconnected back into their communities.

Jesus here deems both women as worthy of God's grace...and both these stories today have happy endings don't they?

But that's not always the case when it comes to healing is it? And that's generally not what we experience in our lifetime is it?

And what does the role of our faith or trust in God play in our healing?

Obviously there's something to that idea, right?

I'm sure you've all heard of the placebo effect: where a person believes that something will help them and then they are helped through their own beliefs.

I also don't believe that there is one way to trust or have faith in Jesus...there doesn't seem to be any formula for how Jesus' or His disciples heal throughout the entirety of the gospels...

Today one woman has the audacity to reach out and transgress the rules and protocols to touch Jesus... in other words she's claiming her own healing here... and then we get a powerful man in the community, Jarius, kneeling down powerless and humble before God...and both have their wishes granted.

Mark goes to great lengths to describe the woman in a long winded sentence to describe her past: having suffered, having spent money, having not benefitted, and having gotten worse, having heard about Jesus, and having come from behind ... then comes the long delayed main verb... she touches Jesus' garment.

She has agency here, she acts throughout on her own behalf...she isn't sitting around for rescue like some damsel in distress... nor is she sitting around waiting for Jesus to come and find her...she touches Jesus trusting that He can heal her...having tried everything else...so she touches Jesus and she immediately knows...as does Jesus.

He even asks his disciples who touched him. The healed woman comes forward full of fear and trembling as if caught in this wrongful act and Jesus names her "daughter" which even now fails to capture her in all her fullness.

And this healing is nested inside Jesus' request by an important powerful official of the synagogue...He has authority and standing in Jewish society and perceiving Jesus as having power and being above him requesting Jesus' intervention on his daughters behalf.

...but because of this interruption by a powerless, unclean and unimportant person with no name... Jarius' daughter actually dies. Jesus doesn't make it in time.

Interesting here that Mark places the need of the marginalized and vulnerable as being addressed before the need of the celebrated and powerful...you can imagine the expression on the crowd's face at this interruption.

How many times do we believe God will focus His attention on the powerful and privileged at the expense of the marginalized...or on God's own chosen as opposed to the nobodies who can interrupt us from time to time from the "real" work we need to be doing?

And this interruption actually results in this little girls death?! So what do you do with that...are some worthy over others of medical attention?

There is no formula or magic ritual that gets us closer to God today.

Yet trusting in God is what all the folks in this story and all you folks here today have in common...Trust...the word Aman in Hebrew... we translate it as faith...

In Marks gospel we see Jesus has authority over life and death, health and sickness, clean and unclean...and His authority is exercised gently in direct relationship with those who come trusting in Him... priority is afforded to the marginalized... the outcast... the silent... but once again there is no formula for us to follow...other than to follow Jesus in faith.

How many of us here are getting up in years and are also ailing in so many ways...we come here and trust that God will heal us?

So we come here every Sunday and all of us here I can attest have some ailment... be it physical, spiritual, psychological...whatever... so why are some folks healed and while others are not?

And do we always get what we pray for? Sometimes... but not always... and why are some prayers answered and some not?

Once again we have to go another level deeper to see what is actually going on here...see for us... our prayers may actually be answered in ways beyond what we are imagining...

What may be a matter of a simple healing to us may more profoundly edge us into a deeper relationship with God...and with others.

In all instances Jesus shows compassion (to suffer with/to break bread with)... there's also something else going on here... the two women today... because of their conditions... they were both living in isolation...Isolated from their families and communities...to include, by law, being isolated from God as well!

Both were separated from wholeness. Jesus not only restored their physical well-being... but I think more importantly, Jesus reconnected them back with their communities... in fact he even calls the unclean women daughter as well... in other words she's every bit as precious to Jesus and is also named as part of and belonging to God's family!

So many times, what Jesus brings is wholeness or peace... not so much a magic bullet to whatever is ailing us...we are not meant to live forever...at least not in these fragile container we call our bodies...but we are all called to live eternally connected to God's Holy family as daughters and sons – children of God.

Many times, whatever ails us can actually disconnect us from our communities, our friends, and our families (eg COVID). We are shaped and made truly human only when we're in relationship to one another...wherever you see human suffering you will find isolation...and through compassion we can be present and connect to those in isolation...that's why visiting and reaching out to the sick here is so important.

When folks are no longer coming here because of illness they then come to feel isolated and disconnected to our church and even sometimes from God.

If you only think in human terms about me and my own problems then you just might come to believe that God is fickle... healing some while not healing others... listening to some... while being distant and deaf to others.

However this will never be the case when looked at through connection and relationships... relationship with God and connections to others in our community is what matters most...It restores...Tikuun Olam...community and overall health and wellbeing to us and our communities and families in this precious yet short life here on earth.

These remarkable connected yet disconnected stories help us to see the range and the reach of this mystery that we call God.

Mark's intertwined stories interpret each other... and at the same time reinterpret for us what it means to be healed even as we read these stories 2000 years later.

So may you come to experience today...not just healing...but restoration, re-connection and rebirth...and may you come to be agents of compassion to all those suffering and isolated in the world ...bringing healing and wholeness to all God's daughters and sons here in the kingdom of God.

Your faithful servant,

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