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Mark 5: 21-43

As always our scripture today has us going in many different directions even though the main focus is a lesson on faith; there are many ways we could get to the end result. So let's first look at what it is that this story tells us; what is the context on which this is written, who are the important players in the story, what are the social, political and religious implications of this story both then and for us now.

You see all that Jesus brings to us through the Bible has to be interpreted through this way of thinking or it simply becomes a nice story of healing. Another notch on the proverbial belt of healings and death raisings attributed to Jesus when in fact it is so much deeper than that. Now, I know I say this week after week in one way or another but it is imperative that we recognise that the work of Jesus was not always as it seemed; Jesus was a troublemaker in the eyes of the law both civic and religious. He was not the mild, meek, just let it go type of guy we can sometimes categorize him as. If we want to follow Jesus, live like Jesus, aspire to be like him it is absolutely imperative that we understand this.

The reason that I am emphasizing this so much today is that Jesus breaks all kinds of rules in this story according to the laws of the Jewish people. In fact, not just Jesus breaks the rules but so do other key characters in this story. So, here we go.

The writer of Mark had a knack for writing his gospel in such a way that one story would fit into another. These stories within stories would aid in interpreting one another. And so we have it here, Jesus has come to the area, a great crowd has gathered and one man Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, falls at Jesus feet and begs him to come to his house to heal his 12 year old daughter who is at the point of death, verse 23, "come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." This influential leader of the synagogue is showing his faith in Jesus, not his fellow leaders in the church, but this man Jesus, to heal his daughter; he is acknowledging Jesus' power over death.

But wait before the miracle can happen there is an interruption. They are on their way to the house with the crowd pressing in when Jesus notices something so powerful he stops; a woman has come up behind Jesus and touched his cloak and he felt that power had gone from him. Jesus turns and asks, "who touched my clothes?" Can you imagine being that woman in that moment? "Who touched my clothes? He asks as he looks around him. Those with Jesus respond, "look at this crowd, who knows who touched you. Now come on we have a schedule to keep, a little girl to heal."

But a woman falls down in fear and trembling and tells Jesus the whole truth. About the doctors, about the 12 years of bleeding, about the way she had been discarded by the community; the whole truth. No doubt this whole truth means a long story recapping her past 12 years. The woman already knew she was healed, she felt it immediately upon

touching Jesus she could have run away and never faced Jesus but she stayed and told the whole truth.

So here are some of the rules I was saying were broken. This woman was alone, no male figure to speak for her, no male figure to be with her in the marketplace; she was risking being stoned to death by being out on her own according to Jewish law. Her faith gives her the courage to do such a thing, her desperation would play into that but her faith moves her into action. This is her last resort and she knows it will be successful, that is why she risks it all.

2nd rule breaking; she touched Jesus a Jewish man while she was bleeding meaning she had just defiled him and made him unclean. According to purity laws he now would need to go through a ritual bath and cleansing to be made clean again. Most men would have lashed out at this strange woman for such a mistake and disregard for the man's purity again placing her in grave danger of being killed for such a bold move.

But Jesus response is "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." There are two items in this one sentence that tell the story here. Socially, by Jesus calling her daughter he has claimed her as his, giving her the proper status to be in the community once again. Claiming her as daughter, he is taking her under his wing of protection as a male in this time and place. She has permission through Jesus to be where she is, with him in public. The second item is that Jesus says "Your" faith has made you well. She did it all herself, "Your" faith has made you well; teaching us or reminding us that we are the ones who make ourselves well through faith in the power of God.

But have you forgotten about the 12 year old girl awaiting her healing? Has Jesus forgotten that he was on his way to help someone else to be well again? Her father is not that thrilled that Jesus has stopped to help this woman, this outcast who clearly had no respect for Jewish law because of her actions. She has interrupted the real reason Jesus has come to heal the child. Here again is the story within the story, while Jesus is listening to the woman telling the whole truth, Jairus has received word that his daughter has died. Now place yourself in his shoes. This unclean woman has interrupted Jesus long enough that his daughter has died. It is her fault that his daughter has died. So what is the use in Jesus coming to the house now, his people ask.

Jesus responds to them by saying to Jairus, "do not fear, only believe." "Do not fear, only believe." They continue to his house and find the people there weeping and wailing and Jesus asks why they are doing this, the girl is only sleeping Jesus tells them. They scoff at Jesus even laugh. He goes to the child, takes her hand and says "Talitha cum." "Little girl, get up!"

Once again Jesus has broken the laws; once again the purity law of touching a dead body would defile Jesus and make him unclean, but he is not concerned with that, never even addresses it and although the story is not centred around purity laws it gives us perhaps a new understanding of the risks that people took to get to Jesus; the sacrifices

that were made by both the people and by Jesus to heal the sick, raise the dead, deal with the authorities and challenge the laws of the time. Jesus takes on the interruptions.

This is what Jesus does and this is how faith is shown. To be faithful enough to risk, and challenge, and act even when it seems hopeless or useless or an interruption in his schedule.

This story also shows us that Jesus seeks relationship with us; even though he is on his way to heal the little girl he stops and seeks out the woman who has sought him out. Even as he is being rushed to a rich man's house he has time to stop and address the needs of an outcast, she is poor, isolated, nameless and female, whereas Jairus is named, a synagogue official with wealth and household, and male. The lesson here is that Jesus' focus on the disenfranchised takes nothing away from others who turn to him in faith. Do not fear, only believe.

And so rich or poor, male or female, white or black, Jew or Gentile, old or young, all who come to Jesus, who seek relationship with him, who touch him and those whom he touches are simply more important than his schedule or his purity for that matter. How often are our lives interrupted by people and things? We may have had a list of things to do, or an agenda to keep and all of a sudden we are interrupted by life. You see, this is what it is like to serve God, to be a disciple; we have to be willing to be interrupted. This is the stuff of discipleship; our chances to serve God don't always come at the most opportune times, in fact almost never.

Of course the choice is ours, we can decide not to be interrupted, we can refuse to give in to the broken agenda and stick to our list of things to do but be warned that if we do we will soon find that people have stopped asking us for our help. William Willimon states that "we can turn people away until they know not to ask us. We can ignore people in need until we don't even see them. We can claim to be God's people without ever allowing God to interrupt."

When you decide to be a disciple, God will have little regard for your agenda or your attempts to impose order on your life. Instead God may interrupt with hurting friends, broken homes, and needy strangers having faith in us that we will not be too busy. Will we have the faith to put our lists and watches in our pockets and follow?

Amen

