

A Story of Two Touches — Rev. Denise Stone

Text: Mark 5:21-43

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A couple of weeks ago I told you that when reading the Gospel of Mark, you will encounter “sandwiches” – where there is a story within a story. Each story helps the reader understand the other story and the truth that is being expressed.

Today, we have just such a “Markan Sandwich.”

Listen carefully to see the commonalities and differences in our two stories as I read our New Testament passage for today from Mark, Chapter 5, verses 21-43.

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³ and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” ²⁴ So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” ²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped;

and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵ While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.ⁱ

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

We have two miracle stories this morning. The first one is the beginning and ending of the passage I just read. The second one is sandwiched in the middle.

There are a couple of things that these two stories have in common.

First, is Faith. Both Jairus and the woman have a strong faith. They have faith in the ability of Jesus to heal. Their faith is so strong in Jesus' ability to heal that they both seek out Jesus despite their position in society.

Jairus, as a ruler of the Synagogue, holds a position of high esteem in their community and is likely well off. He is probably aware that the Pharisees are not happy with Jesus, but he is desperate. His 12-year-old daughter is extremely ill, on the verge of death. That fact propels him to dismiss the societal and religious concerns he might have had about Jesus to reach out to Jesus and beg for his help.

The woman in the story who had an "issue of blood" for 12 years is on the opposite end of the societal spectrum from Jairus. Because of her medical condition she was in a state of being ritually unclean – meaning she was basically an outcast from her family, friends, and community. She had no wealth because she had spent it all on doctors and

medical treatments – that did not work. She had only gotten worse. She is also desperate. She was at the end of her rope – she probably thought of herself as in a terminal condition. That fact propels her to dismiss the societal and religious concerns she might have had about coming into the crowd and to reach out her hand to touch Jesus' clothing, believing that would be all that was necessary for her healing.

Second, the stories have conflict in common. The crowd in both instances serves as obstacles to healing taking place. In the middle story of the woman, the crowd makes it difficult for her to get near Jesus. She is ritually unclean and if she touches anyone, they become ritually unclean. The woman must decide if the obstacle of the people is enough to prevent her from getting healing. It was not - she went forward with her intent to reach Jesus for healing.

In the story of Jairus, the crowd also makes it difficult – because of the crowd, Jesus pauses to search out and find the person who touched his clothes. This searching delayed Jesus in getting to the little girl. He is delayed long enough for people to reach Jairus with the news that his daughter is dead. Jesus overhears this and asks Jairus to “Fear not, just believe.” Jairus must decide if the obstacle of the people was enough to prevent him from believing that Jesus could still heal / raise his daughter from the

dead. Jairus went forward with Jesus believing Jesus could still heal his daughter.

The last thing I want to point out that the stories have in common have to do with interruptions. Each part of this story is about dealing with interruptions.

First, Jesus has just gotten out of the boat on his trip back across the Sea of Galilee. Jairus approaches and begs Jesus to come with him to heal his daughter. We do not know what Jesus was planning to do when he got out of the boat, but I doubt that Jairus was on the schedule.

The second interruption is when the woman comes and secretly touches Jesus garment. Jesus feels power leave his body, so he stops everyone to search for who it was who touched him. His disciples are almost speechless – “with this crowd, you ask, ‘who touched you??’”

Can you imagine if you were Jairus? Jesus is on his way to heal your daughter and he stops everything to find out who touched him? Talk about interruptions.

Jesus delays going to Jairus’ home even further as he listens to the woman’s story and the description of her faith. She was healed. Jesus does not scold her for her breach of ritual law protocols, but instead calls her daughter and tells her, “Your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

The next interruption comes from some people from Jairus' house. They arrive to tell Jairus that he no longer needs to bother the "teacher" because his daughter is dead. Jesus overhears this interruption and looks at Jairus and tells him to not fear but believe.

Jesus does not allow the interruptions to delay him any further in going to the little girl. He only takes Peter, James and John of the disciples with him from this point on.

When they arrive, there are professional mourners (a common practice for the day) already at Jairus' home. Jesus says for them to stop the commotion, that the girl is only sleeping. Now, everyone knows the girl is dead. Including Jesus. This is yet another interruption, for they laugh at Jesus and tell him they know dead.

Jesus does not allow the interruption to delay him further. He puts everyone out of the house except Jairus, the girl's mother and his three disciples. They go to the room where the girl's body lies. Jesus speaks the words, little girl, get up. And she does.

Obviously, everyone is amazed. Jesus interrupts them – do not tell anyone what happened here, and give the girl something to eat.

Faith, conflict, and interruptions.

Sounds pretty much like everyday life for Christians, don't you think?

Let's look at how these are seen in our lives today – but in reverse order.

Let us take interruptions first.

We all must deal with interruptions every day. You have your day all scheduled out and a phone call sidetrails you. Or your boss comes in with a new project that needs to be done ASAP. You could be enjoying a few minutes of downtime when your child or grandchild needs something from you.

Interruptions. Most interruptions are not life and death situations like we find in the story of Jairus' daughter and the woman in today's passage. However, interruptions are just that – interruptions.

Unless they aren't. In a commentary I was reading, the author, Lamar Williamson, Jr. quotes Henri Nouwen when he referenced a teacher who said, "You know... my whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work."ⁱⁱ

Sometimes, the interruptions are the most important parts of your day. I have very often said that I believe the ministry I do is often most valuable in the interruptions – when people need something unexpectedly.

Could this be true for you as well? When your child or grandchild interrupts you because they have gotten hurt or had a bad dream – what you do then matters more than any other part of the day – if not to you, most certainly for them.

Let me encourage you to not get frustrated when you are interrupted, but take the time to view the interruption as an opportunity. You may be able to help someone in ways you never imagined.

Now let's move to the next topic: Conflict.

I hate conflict. I will do just about anything to avoid conflict. It makes me uncomfortable, sometimes even sick to my stomach.

Very few people, I imagine, like conflict.

Yet, conflict is also an everyday occurrence.

You and your spouse don't agree on finances or how to discipline your child. You might get into an argument with a friend or co-worker. You might disagree with a family member over politics or religion.

Conflict comes in all shapes and sizes. We all experience conflict.

It is what you do with conflict that matters.

Do you lie and say everything is okay when it isn't? Do you avoid the situation and fume about it? Those options can damage relationships or make your job or friendships nearly impossible to maintain.

Jesus did not avoid the crowds that caused problems in today's stories. Jesus did not scold the woman who touched him – and others, making them ritually unclean. Jesus did tell the professional mourners to leave so that he could heal Jairus' daughter, but there is no indication that Jesus was mean or cruel to them in the process.

Jesus managed the conflict that he encountered in today's stories. That is how we need to handle conflict – we need to manage it. Not overreact, not underreact. Approach conflict with kindness and compassion (as Jesus did with both the woman and the child). Be firm when conflict is an obstacle (as Jesus did with the professional mourners).

Do all things in love.

Which brings us to the primary point of today's stories – Faith. Had neither Jairus nor the woman had strong faith, the outcome of these stories might have been different.

I feel a need to pause here for a moment. Miracles stories like these can sometimes cause people to misuse scripture. These stories **DO NOT** tell us that if you pray hard enough God will give you the answers to all your wishes. We all know people of who were sick and then

died despite many, many people praying for them to be healed. We all know of situations that do not improve even though we pray earnestly for that to happen.

These stories DO tell us that God is with us in our journeys – regardless of how the end results turn out. Jesus showed kindness and compassion to both the woman and to Jairus, his wife and his daughter. God wants to show the same kindness and compassion to us, to you.

That is what Faith is about. Jairus and the woman both had faith in Jesus. They both showed that they had faith by their words and their actions. Faith is believing in God to act in your life in many ways – some asked for, some not. Faith is believing that God sent Jesus, God in the flesh, so that we might be in a closer relationship with God.

Remember what Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Having faith does not mean that God will act like Santa Claus and give us everything we ask for. Having faith *does mean* that you know God cares for you. Having faith does not mean that God will change the bad decisions other people make that negatively affect you. Having faith *does mean* that God will walk through that negative valley with you.

Faith is believing IN God. Just as Jairus and the woman did.

My prayer for this congregation, for each of you, is that your faith in our loving, compassionate God will sustain you, through each conflict and through each interruption you encounter. Let us allow our conflicts and interruptions to deepen that faith.

Please pray with me.

Holy God, Creator of Life,
you call us out of our dark places,
offering us the grace of new life.

When we see nothing but hopelessness,
you surprise us with the breath of your spirit.

Call us out of our complacency and routines,
set us free from our self-imposed bonds,
and fill us with your spirit of life, compassion, and
peace,

In the name of Jesus, your anointed one, we pray [in
faith]. Amen.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ Williamson, pg. 112.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Proper%208%20B>. Written by Rev. Nancy J., and posted on her wonderings through life and other such nonsense. <http://ruminari.wordpress.com/>.