

Fear or Faith

July 1, 2012

Mark 5: 21-43

21 When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. 22 Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet 23 and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." 24 So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. 25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. 30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" 32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." 35 While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?" 36 Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." 37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." 40 But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "'Talitha koum!'" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. 43 He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Once again this week we are getting our scripture lesson from the Gospel of Mark. And once again, Mark is doing what he does so well. A couple of weeks ago we talked about how Mark likes to tell two stories at the same time. Here he is doing just that, telling two stories in one. He starts by telling the story of Jarius who is a leader in the synagogue. Being a religious leader, Jarius is obviously a devout Jew. Jarius has a sick daughter. The little girl is so sick, she is about to die. Mark doesn't tell us whether Jarius has any more children or not, and I don't think that would make any difference. If you have a child that is on the verge of dying, wouldn't you do everything in your power to see to it that they got the help they needed? Just like any parent, Jarius has tried everything and nothing has worked, so Jarius has come to Jesus in desperation asking for help for his young daughter. She is sick and about to die. (Here again I think it's important for us to recognize that Jarius is a leader in the synagogue and Jesus is not well received by the Jewish religious leaders) Jesus, I need your help. I've heard of all the wonderful things you have been doing. I've heard of all the different people you have healed. Please, please, come to my house and heal my daughter. And Jesus is OK with that, OK, let's go. So Jesus and Jarius start toward Jarius' house. While on the way, an unnamed woman shows up. Here is the second story in this passage. This woman has had an illness for twelve years, a bleeding disorder. According to Jewish law, this woman is considered unclean. She is an outcast from society. She has been to doctor after doctor to be healed. She has spent all the money she had on medical attention, all to no avail. Actually, she continues to get even sicker. She too has heard of Jesus and his healing powers. So she has come to town to find Jesus. She has come for what is probably her last chance at being healed; her last chance for any type of normal life. You see, she knows her place in society. For twelve long years, no one would have anything to do with her. She is totally persona non grata. As far as society is concerned, she does not exist. She is considered unclean. If she sits in a chair, then that chair is unclean and no one else can sit in the chair until after sundown.

If you touch her, you are considered unclean and no one is allowed to touch you until after sundown. The list of rules and regulations concerning her and her un-cleanliness is a long one. However she is used to them so she has no illusions about her chances of being able to have a face to face conversation with Jesus, she knows that Jesus won't even touch her. But if, just if, she can get close enough to touch the hem of his robe... he won't even have to know I touched it, I will be healed. Stop and think about this for just a moment. The hem of a robe was dirty. In Jesus time, everyone wore long robes that touched the ground. Over time, the hems of these robes actually got pretty filthy. So here's this sick woman and all she wants to do is touch the hem, not his shoulder, or the sleeve, or the back, just the hem, and he doesn't even have to know it, so that she may be healed. And that is exactly what she did; she slipped through the crowds, got to Jesus and touched the hem of his robe. Immediately she was healed. She began to sneak away from Jesus. He doesn't even have to know I've touched his robe. I'm satisfied, I'm healed. My lord has healed me. But Jesus knew. Listen to verse 30: **At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"** Doesn't the power of Jesus just amaze you? She touched the hem of his robe and he felt his healing power go to the woman. He didn't see her touch, didn't feel her touch, but he felt her faith. Listen to verses 33 and 34: **Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.** And be freed from your suffering. We know she has been sick for twelve years and we can imagine the pain and suffering this illness has caused her. To be freed from that must have been a great relief. But, there is another kind of suffering that she has been freed from. All of a sudden, this nameless woman who has been an outcast from society for the past twelve years is now cured, is now declared to be the daughter of Jesus. She has just been given all rights and privileges of being a full citizen again. She can lead a normal life.

Wait a minute. Let's get back to our first story. Has Jesus forgotten about Jarius? I can just imagine Jarius at this point; what, why are you stopping don't you know my little girl is sick. Hurry up, we need to get going. While all this is going on, some people came from Jarius' house and told him that his daughter had died. We're sorry man, leave the teacher alone. There's nothing he can do now. Let's go on home and take care of things. Jarius has to be crushed. But Jesus tells him, **"Don't be afraid; just believe."** They finish the journey to Jarius' house. Already the mourners are there. It was common practice to hire mourners in Jesus time. The more money you had, the more mourners you would hire. Jarius must have been pretty well off because there was a crowd there wailing and moaning. Jesus put a stop to that: **"Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.** With this, he ran every one away except for Jarius, his wife and the three disciples he had brought with him. They went to the little girl and we read in verse 41: **He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!").**⁴² **Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around.** By his touch and a kind word, another person healed.

Here again, I think Mark is doing the other thing he does so well, he has us looking in the mirror. There were very large crowds around Jesus. Jarius went to speak to Jesus for a specific reason. The sick woman went to see Jesus for a very specific reason. Both wanted healing. Both were afraid of what would happen if healing did not take place. However, both had faith in what Jesus could and would do. I think most of the other people in the crowd went for some other reason; they went to see the superstar; they went to see what this superstar might do. Many other people touched Jesus that day. He was actually bumped and jostled a good bit. I'm sure some of them were even sick, but we didn't hear about them being healed, did we? I think most of the people there were there for the experience, for the entertainment, were there for bragging rights. Back in the late 1980's, Paul McCartney and Wings came to Carter-Finley Stadium in Raleigh. I bought tickets and went. Man was that a fabulous concert. I went strictly for the entertainment and the experience. I had no illusions that after seeing him and hearing him that I would be a better singer or be able to play the piano. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to compare Paul McCartney to Jesus Christ. I'm trying to make a point. I went to the concert strictly for the entertainment and the experience. When I got back from the concert I had some bragging rights. It was cool to say that I had seen Sir Paul in person. It felt good to say man, you should have been there, it was great. Oh, you were there too, wow, wasn't that just the best concert ever. Most of the people who were there to see Jesus that day, were there to have the experience, they were there for the entertainment. They were

there to be seen, they were there to be a part of the crowd. This is where Mark has us look in the mirror again this morning. Why are we here? Are we here for the entertainment? Are we here for bragging rights? Are we here because it's the right place to be seen? Are we here because it's Sunday morning and we're expected to be here. I've got to ask each of you a question, and it's one of those questions only you can answer. I want you to answer to yourself, and I want you to answer truthfully: Why are you here this morning?

Two people went to see Jesus that day for very specific reasons. They went for healing. Jarius and the sick woman went to see Jesus because they had a deep and abiding faith. They had faith that healing would happen. I don't want to be misunderstood this morning. I want to be real clear about this. Just because a person believes in the power of Christ, that does not mean that a person will be healed of one's diseases. Right now, someone may be saying to themselves, "If I really believed like the sick woman, or if I believed like Jarius, I too would be healed. I would be healed of this illness. I would be healed of this inner torment. My husband or wife would be healed. My marriage would be healed. If I only believed like they believed, then I would experience healing in my life." That isn't the point of the story. That is NOT what the story is about. Just because you have deep faith, does not mean that you will inevitably experience healing. It just doesn't work that way. I have known some devout Christians with the deepest of faith, who died. Things are done according to the mystery of the will of God and these things are done beyond our comprehension. Sometimes miraculous things happen, but sometimes not. The scriptures acknowledge this. For every miracle story, there's a story of someone who wasn't healed no matter how desperate they were for life, or how much faith they had. Ultimately, we are not in control. God is in control, and our lives are in God's hands. By knowing this, we can have confidence that in the end, all will be well. Our faith, not our fear proves this to us. Listen to these four short scriptures concerning faith:

Ephesians 3:12; **In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.** Because of your faith, you know that God is there for you and you can go to him with anything.

Ephesians 2:8; **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.** Because of your faith, God has given you the gift of salvation.

2 Corinthians 5:7; **For we live by faith, not by sight.** Because of our faith we will live eternally with Christ.

Hebrews 11:1; **Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.**

In the end, our story today is about two people. No, it's not about the un-named woman with the bleeding disorder. It's not about Jarius or his daughter. Today the Gospel of Mark has each of us take a long look in the mirror. The two people in the story today, Jesus and you. The story today is about faith; it's about your faith in Jesus Christ. So what are we to do? We look in the mirror that the Gospel of Mark puts in front of daily. Jesus said it to Jarius, and he is saying it to us too: **Do not fear, only believe.** So, do not fear, only believe and leave the rest up to God.

Amen