

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 06/30/2024



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, June 30th

Mark 5:21-43

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Transformed through faith

This week's Gospel lection contains two healing stories, one intercalated within the other: The raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead and the healing of a woman with a hemorrhage. If we take these intricately interwoven stories as an isolated text, our focus is drawn primarily to the healings. When we take the broader literary context of Mark's Gospel into account, another focal point emerges. There is a contrast here between the lack of faith of Jesus' disciples covered in last week's Gospel lection (Mark 4:35-41) and the faith of the woman and Jairus in this week's text. Mark's manual on discipleship thus uses more than just the text to emphasize the importance of faith – even in situations of complete hopelessness. At the same time, Jesus does not just restore those afflicted but transforms them. Faith in Christ has social costs, but such faith is necessary to transform society's ills.

Mark 5:21-43 Commentary

In last week's Gospel lection, Jesus and His disciples encountered a violent storm while crossing over the Sea of Galilee. Once they arrived on the Gentile shore, Jesus exorcised the Gerasenes demoniac and then headed back to the Jewish side of the lake. This is where this week's Gospel lection picks up the story. The location is most likely Capernaum (Matthew 9:1). The healing of Jairus' daughter and the woman suffering from a hemorrhage appear in the other synoptic Gospels (Matthew 9:18-26 and Luke 8:40-56). Atypically, Mark's account is the longest.

²¹ And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. ²² Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet ²³ and implored him earnestly, saying, "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 And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.

Jairus is mentioned by name suggesting he was a known person firmly associated with this story. His name is the Greek form of Jair meaning "enlightened" or "illuminated" (Jair of Gilead - Judges 10:3). Jairus had high standing in the local Jewish community. As a ruler of the synagogue, he was responsible for the selection of readers and speakers as well as upkeep and repair of the synagogue building. Jairus was expected to act with a level of dignity and social aloofness. However, here Jairus throws himself at Jesus' feet in the street and pleads with Him. Jairus' faith is expressed in his conviction that Jesus could heal her by simply laying His hands on her.

²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.

²⁷ *She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment.*

²⁸ *For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." ²⁹ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.*

At the opposite end of the status spectrum is the next character mentioned. For twelve years she would have been considered unclean. People would have avoided her. She would have been excluded from the mainstream society. In v.21 there is a reference to a "great crowd" gathered about Jesus and how in v.31 people are pressing around Jesus. How could this woman get close enough to touch Jesus without coming into direct physical contact with others? What would be the consequences to the woman of this behavior once discovered? Like Jairus, the woman had faith in Jesus – *"If I touch even his garments, I will be made well."*

³⁰ *And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" ³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³² And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."*

Despite the urgency of the condition of Jairus' daughter, Jesus engages with the woman. This text provides some unique information on the mechanism of Jesus' healing ability. He felt power go out of Him. The women perhaps expected Jesus to reveal to the crowd what she had done. Notice the condition of the woman – *"...in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth."* The link between faith and healing is stated in the text.

³⁵ *While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."*

Again, the emphasis here on hearing the bad news about Jairus' daughter being dead is, *"Do not fear, only believe."*

³⁷ *And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. But 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.*

Jesus takes only His inner circle of disciples. The scene they encounter at Jairus' house must have been similar to the one they will encounter after Lazarus' death (John 11:33). Jesus has already faced opposition to His ministry but here He faces mockery.

⁴¹ *Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."*

⁴² *And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. ⁴³ And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

Jesus raises the girl from death. Mark records the actual Aramaic words of Jesus. There is no magic chant used. He simply tells the girl to arise. The Aramaic word rendered as *"little girl"* is the feminine singular form of *"youth"* which can also mean *"little lamb."* The girl was 12 years old – the same number of years the woman had been

bleeding. The instruction to give the girl something to eat is perhaps more to do with demonstrating she is alive in her body and thus prevent people from claiming she was a spirit or apparition.

Reflection

The high social status of Jairus and his position within the Jewish religion made no difference to his tragedy. His daughter died. His religion could not save her. The woman was at the opposite end of the social spectrum because of her disease. The doctors could not help her. The disease was her life. She had been afflicted for as long as the little girl had been alive. The woman's cure involved stopping her bleeding. The little girl's cure gave her the chance to live through puberty. The woman could once again be included in communal life. She would no longer be excluded because of her disease. The little girl would now live to take her place in the community. Jesus showed no favoritism based on status. Would it be reasonable to rush to the aid of a dying girl and then come back and engage with the woman? What would an hour or two's delay make for a twelve-year affliction?

A cynic might argue that Jairus and the woman were merely desperate. It was not so much a matter of faith, but it was the desperation of their situations that led them to try anything. After all, what had they to lose? The counter argument is twofold. First, the text makes clear the specific connection between healing and faith/belief. Second, both Jairus and the woman had much at stake. By venturing into the crowd to touch Jesus, how many people did the unclean woman touch and thus make unclean? What would be the penalty for this deliberate breaking of the law if she were ever discovered? As it turned out, Jesus drew the crowd's attention to her! What happened after Jesus had left? Similarly, Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue. His fellow religious leaders were plotting to destroy Jesus (3:6). Scribes had already come down from Jerusalem arguing that Jesus "...is possessed by *Beelzebul*," (3:22). What would be the consequences to Jairus and his privileged position by his going against "the religious system" in which he held a privileged position and openly acknowledging Jesus in this way?

There is a tendency to think that the woman, cured of her disease, was restored into her community and Jairus and his daughter carried on with their lives. The proverbial "and they all lived happily ever after." As we have seen, both Jairus and the woman would have faced consequences to their actions. Their futures would also have been inescapably tied to the popularity of Jesus. Eventually, even the Galilean pilgrims turned against Jesus. In John's Gospel we learn of how the chief priests made plans to kill not only Jesus but Lazarus too since many Jews were believing in Jesus on account of Lazarus being alive and thus a walking testimony to Jesus' power and identity (John 12:10). Would Jairus' daughter face the same threat? Could the notoriety of Jairus (since he is named in Mark's Gospel) stem from what happened to him after he met Jesus rather than before? The text does not reveal what happened to the woman or Jairus and his daughter after their encounter with Jesus. However, rather than their lives simply being restored from the consequences of disease and death, their lives were likely transformed in the process. As a result of their faith in Jesus, their lives took on new meaning and purpose.

The position of these two intercalated healings appears to intentionally contrast the lack of faith of Jesus' disciples in the boat as they faced the violent storm while crossing the Sea of Galilee (4:35-41). While those that were physically present with Jesus doubted, two people from both ends of the social spectrum who had never met Jesus displayed the audacious faith necessary. Imagine what must have been going through the minds of the disciples during this day! Could they be the real subjects of this text? The hopelessness of the situations faced by the woman and Jairus teach us that when medicine or the government or our own status and influence cannot save us, no situation is impossible for Jesus if we have faith. Such faith, however, will often have negative social consequences. Jesus does not heal to restore us but heals to transform us so that we can continue His mission in our time and place. The power that flowed from Jesus is still present in the world today through the Holy Spirit.