

## Sermon ☩ June 27, 2021

Mark 5:21-43

Frank H. Maxwell

Here we have two stories of the healing of women, one on the brink of womanhood, and the other a woman who by her disease was made ritually unclean and consequently an outcast in Jewish society.

The first is a story of a child that Jesus went to see. She had an advocate, namely her father, to intercede for her. Jesus' visit to her house was a public event and the crowd knew that Jesus was going there. In fact, the publicity was potentially scandalous for Jairus, a leader in the Jewish establishment. His great love for his daughter led him to risk everything—even his reputation—that her life might be saved.

In contrast, the woman with the hemorrhage had no one to intercede for her. (And I need to point out here that this hemorrhage has to do with a menstrual problem. We preachers . . . especially male preachers . . . seem to tip-toe round what is actually happening here. The monthly discharge of blood by women was perceived to be a shameful thing. And women were literally cast out of society for those few days each month.)

Back to the story . . . because the woman with the hemorrhage was ritually unclean she had to act covertly. By Jewish law, she could not have even touched a holy man. Her approach to Jesus was daring. This makes her story unusual and particularly moving.

These two stories have some interesting parallels. First parallel—the woman with the issue of blood had been suffering as long as the little girl had been living. And Jairus' daughter was at that age in Jewish society when a little girl was recognized as a woman (i.e., the beginning of her menstrual cycle).

Second—both women were designated as *daughters*. And note that Jesus called the woman with the hemorrhage, daughter, the only time that he used such an address.

More than anything else . . . both stories are stories of faith. In Jairus we see faith struggling to be born despite fear of loss and fear of ridicule. And the woman with the hemorrhage dares to live the kind of faith Jairus is struggling to find.

The woman believed that all she needed to do was simply touch the garment of Jesus and she would be made well. In ancient times belief in the curative powers of a healer's garments, handkerchief, even their shadow was common. Such things were viewed as extensions of the person.

Did you notice any curious aspects of this healing? The healing apparently took place before Jesus had any knowledge of it. Did you wonder why he asked, "*Who touched my clothes?*" And what was the deal with his feeling power going out from him? This miracle can be understood in a variety of ways. Some modern studies have revealed a correlation between some healing and a feeling like a surge of electrical current. Perhaps such a current is what Jesus experienced.

When Jesus said, “*Your faith has healed you,*” he really meant just that. Jesus could certainly heal people of his own accord, but the faith of others could apparently draw upon his healing power.

Healing is a mystery. In this story there was an exchange of power or energy that preceded the dialogue and had a compassion of its own. The subsequent dialogue reaffirmed the healing that had already taken place. Jesus' words to the woman reaffirmed his willingness to heal but asserted it was her *faith* that healed her.

The miracle at work in the healing of Jairus' daughter has to do with not losing hope. When Jesus said, “*The child is not dead, but asleep,*” they laughed at him.

Jesus kept asking Jairus to have faith in spite of the crowd and his own anxiety. However, Jairus did not seem capable of the same faith as the woman with the hemorrhage. Yet, that is what God expects of us. And the *good news* is that despite Jairus' weak faith, Jesus healed the child.

And there is more *good news* . . . Jesus valued the feminine and sought to heal where there was illness or injury. He valued women young and old, rich and poor, socially acceptable and unacceptable. This point is borne out time and time again in scripture.

These two stories, especially the one about the woman, speak poignantly of the shame of disease, especially those diseases about which we never speak. Jesus' healing and loving acceptance of a woman who was ritually unclean offers dignity and hope for all who suffer shame as well as illness.

Finally, these stories speak good news about faith and hope. Even in the darkest, most difficult and troubled times we are asked to have faith. And you know and I know that this simply isn't the way things are. The incredible news is that even if we have but a small glimmer of faith, God will not abandon us.

At various times in life, all of us have private pain . . . and in a sense all of us bleed. And, you know, sometimes the pain takes over, and it is as if we are constantly bleeding. At such times it is especially easy to feel far away from God.

There is a contemporary Methodist prayer which speaks of such times:

*Do we not find then that we have lost touch with our Lord?  
He is obscured by the crowd of our concerns;  
the crowd of our activities;  
perhaps even the crowd of our own words.  
Jesus, help us to touch you now. Amen*

