

# SUMMER

## SERMON SERIES - 2021

June 27, 2021

*Pentecost 5*

Mark 5:21-43

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His name was Jairus. She, on the other hand, had no name—defined in Scripture by only her disease...the Hemorrhaging Woman.

He was part of the temple elite. She was not welcome in the Temple—her continuous, 12-year hemorrhage made her ritually unclean.

Jairus had wealth and power. The woman had nothing having spent everything she had searching for a cure.

Jairus and the woman with the hemorrhage couldn't be any more polar-opposites if they tried. And yet, on this day, we hear that they shared something very important. Desperation.

This morning, we hear a story within a story. We begin with Jairus. A leader in the community. Probably a man used to being in control of the situation and in command of his resources. Today, however...he is desperate. His only child is near death and there's nothing he can do about it except beg Jesus to come and lay hands on her so she may be made well and live. Not hesitating...Jesus, follows him towards his home.

On their way, a large group of people surge around Jesus. Hidden within the faces of this crowd, is a woman who has been bleeding for 12, long years. Not only has her health be impacted by this disorder, but so has her social and emotional well-being. Her condition has made her an outcast, making contact with her family, friends and worship community, impossible. Having heard about Jesus, she pushes her way through the crowd, only hoping to touch the hem of his cloak. She too is desperate.

The first miracle occurs when she does exactly that. It was that simple...that easy...in the blink of an eye, she has her life back. Her bleeding stops...and so does Jesus. Having felt power leave him, he addresses the crowd to find out who has touched him. In fear and trembling, the woman approaches this teacher-healer, falls at his feet, tells him her story and begs for mercy. Jesus stops and pushes pause in his journey to get to Jairus' daughter to bless this woman with compassion. He calls her 'daughter,' acknowledges her great faith, and then sends her on her way to live her life in fullness once more.

But this interaction delays him from getting to Jairus' daughter. Word comes that the young girl has now died. But Jesus is undeterred. He comforts Jairus' as they continue to the family home ...'do not fear, only believe,' he tells the distraught temple official. And upon pushing his way through the gathered mourners who were already weeping in grief, he enters the house, he takes the child by her hand and tells her to get up. And she does just that. She walks about, and then, I imagine, goes to the kitchen to find a snack.

Now I know and understand that depending on where you're situated, you may have more or less of a degree of hindsight as we begin to transition out of this time of pandemic. As more and more people are vaccinated, I feel more and more hopeful. And maybe this is why I was readily able to see some parallels between our Gospel story today and the time and place in which we have found or continue to find ourselves over the past 15 months.

In a blog-post from the end of April, Diana Butler Bass talks about "displacement" and how the pandemic has led to a feeling of being removed from our everyday lives and the way we relate, move and have our being.<sup>1</sup> The woman with the hemorrhage and Jairus have also been displaced by the events in their lives and I would imagine, are feeling rather discombobulated by their circumstances. The woman with the hemorrhage has effectively been physically removed from her worshiping community as well as her social relationships. She has been in self-isolation, if you will, for twelve long years.

Jairus has had his world turned upside down by a sudden illness and subsequent death of a loved one—an experience devastatingly familiar to over 25,000 Canadians and 3.69 million people world-wide who have lost loved ones to this virus.<sup>2</sup>

The woman with the hemorrhage and Jairus have experienced their fair-share of grief and loss. The woman by the loss of the life she once knew; separated from those things and people who

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Butler Bass. <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/religion-after-pandemic?token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkljozMzgONTkwNCwicG9zdF9pZC16MzU2MDU3ODIsI8iOiJZOHRYSIsImIhdCI6MTYyMTYyMDEwNywiZXhwIjoxNjlxNjlxNzA3LCJpc3MiOiJwdWItNDc0MDAiLCJzdWIiOiJwb3N0LXJiYWN0aW9uIn0.TloC0lCd-32geEXgesQnuIVTc3AsXL1VeQfAQMFqXMQ>

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing this sermon (June, 2021). <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-data>

give her life meaning and depth. She has been languishing; likely grieving and feeling the loss of the life she once lived.

Jairus' grief is more acute but incredibly profound. His daughter, who was gravely ill, has died. Suddenly. In an instant, life as he knows it has made an unwelcomed turn. He is living every parents' worst nightmare. His grief, however short-lived, is palpable.

It's into this mess of emotion...of illness, grief and loss, of languishing and despair that Jesus comes alongside. Over the past 15 months or so, there have been many people the world over, I'm sure, who have prayed for God to intervene in this pandemic. To bring an end to the illness, loneliness, isolation, fear, desperation. And while most of us have experienced a sense of this at one time or another, the inequities laid bare by this pandemic mean that certain sectors of our society have bore the weight of the catastrophic outcomes of COVID-19. I'm thinking of racialized front-line workers who have no choice but to show up to work so the rest of us can stay home, thus exposing them to a higher proportion of illness and sometimes death. I'm thinking of women who have bore the economic consequences of reducing their hours to care for children who are at home, or have lost their jobs entirely. I'm thinking of our elderly and most vulnerable population who were most susceptible to COVID-19 in the first and second waves and yet, in some places in Canada, still remain under lockdown; unable to see their families or have much interaction with the outside world. I'm willing to bet that many people have found themselves praying for a miracle...praying for God to show up; to finally end this thing, or, in the words of my five-year-old, asking almost daily: "why can't God just make COVID go away so I can go back to school, see my grandma and grandpa, and play with my friends?"

I think one of the most important things coming out of this time is how we have now been given the miracle of sight—an opportunity to see with our own eyes, the inequities laid bare by this pandemic. And with this new sight and insight, those of us in a position of privilege have the obligation to give voice to these inequities and advocate for real and lasting change so that life can be better for everyone. And if our eyes have been opened to the disparities that drive despair during this time of pandemic, maybe this is our call to keep our eyes open to see suffering and to work for justice and equity in our communities; across our country and the world-over.<sup>3</sup> We cannot squander or ignore what this pandemic has revealed to us.

This miracle of sight and awareness is both an opportunity and responsibility. But we do not walk this journey alone. We have each other and we have God. These miracle stories as they're told, are not stories that promise a cure for everyone who has faith...but what these stories do, is tell us of a Saviour—a teacher-healer who hears us; who cares for us...who comes alongside us, and who promises to always be with us in times of trouble...in times of joy and in all times in between. Nothing can stop God from being present...not even death.

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<sup>3</sup> [nytimes.com/2020/03/15/world/europe](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/world/europe), accessed on June 1, 2021.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes:

*Jesus' miracles remind us that the way things are is not the way they will always be. Every healing, every banishment of evil is like a hole poked in the opaque fabric of time and space. The kingdom breaks through and for a moment or two we see how things will be—or how they really are right now in the mind of God— and then it's over.*<sup>4</sup>

The true miracles are ordinary...the way God bumps up against us every day...through prayer... through worship...through our interaction with each other, and when we are changed in some way by this contact. Sometimes, we are given new sight and insight and called to new action to help reveal God in the here and now. This is the hope of our faith...the ordinary miracles as they unfold each and every day, calling us to new understanding of compassion and grace; to work alongside God whose reign of justice and equity strives each and every day to make life better for everyone. And so we do our best to walk alongside and to live in fervent hope that the way things are now are not the way they will always be. May it be so. Thanks be to God.

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, Bread of Angels, Cowley Publications, 1997, pp. 136-137