

Pastor Joe Polzin  
Mark 5:21-43  
“From Fear to Faith”  
Year B – Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 1, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel reading from Mark is our text today, and I'd invite you to open your Bibles and follow along with me, as we look at the healing of the woman and the raising of Jairus' daughter. Two individuals. Two different miracles. And yet Mark tells their story together, side by side for a reason.

He starts off by introducing both Jairus and the woman in the crowd. And there are important differences between the two from a worldly perspective. Jairus is a ruler of the synagogue. That means that he was likely a wealthy man, who sponsored his local house of worship. He may have even hosted the synagogue in his own home. He is named by Mark, and many know Jairus. As far as we can tell, he would be well-thought-of, liked, and respected by all those around him.

In contrast, there is also this woman, who had long been suffering a disease or disorder of some kind that caused this internal hemorrhaging, and constant bleeding. But that wouldn't have been the worst of it. Besides her daily suffering, she would have been cast off, considered “unclean” by the holy laws of the day. Without a stoppage of bleeding, there would be no way for her to ritually cleanse herself, and therefore, no way for her to approach God.

It may have been very likely that she had been wealthy once, perhaps a widow inheriting her husband's estate, because Mark notes that she had “spent all that she had” (5:26) on physicians, who did nothing for her except make her suffer more, and in the end, only make her condition worse. Mark gives her no name, so to us she comes across as she was likely perceived by those around her, insignificant and lowly.

But there is also much that bind these two together, and why their stories are being told in this interconnected way. Jairus, though a well-respected leader with everything he could possibly need, had been brought low, as his twelve-year-old daughter was about to die, and there was nothing more he could do about it. And this woman, who had been suffering for twelve long years, had *already* been brought low—medically, ritually, and socially, and there was nothing more she could do about it.

But these two helpless and humble people had the same exact response. It was a faithful response. In their need, they turned to Jesus. And Jesus provided the same salvific answer for both of them. Jesus would deliver them through their fear into faith.

Jairus first says to Jesus, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her that she may be made well and live” (5:23). He was imploring Jesus, begging Jesus to intercede for his daughter. Which is significant. It indicates that he had the faith to know that it was Jesus who had the power to stop the oncoming train of death, and to be able to restore life. It doesn't seem he had to say much more, because Jesus simply agreed, and went with him.

And on the way, the woman in the crowd approached Jesus. But not head-on, like Jairus. No, she knew she couldn't. She was not bold enough to demand such an interaction. But she, too, had the faith to know that this Jesus had the power to restore her life, medically and socially, because she said to herself, “If I touch even his garments, I will be made well” (5:28). She didn't

need a show. She didn't even need Jesus to acknowledge her. She just needed to be close enough to touch him.

And amazingly, that's exactly what happened. And what does it say about Jesus that even though this woman never intended to speak to him, Jesus insisted that a conversation takes place? Obviously, Jesus would have known who touched him, yet still he asked, "Who touched my garments?" (5:30). The disciples, of course, as wise as they always are, answered, "Uh, Jesus, you see the crowds pressing around you, don't you? What you do mean, 'Who touched you?' Everyone is!" (5:31). Very wise.

But that didn't stop Jesus from continuing to pursue this woman. Because though he knew who touched him, he was providing her an opportunity to make herself known to him. And she did. In fact, knowing that she had been healed, she came "in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth" (5:33). How she, an unclean, undeserving woman, technically making Jesus ritually unclean in the process, by the way, dared to touch Jesus in the bold expectation of being healed. And she had been! And it confirmed that she was in the presence of someone so divine, so Godly that she could do nothing except fall before him in fear.

But Jesus didn't scold or deride her. He simply looked at her and said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (5:34). Jesus took this long-suffering woman who faithfully and fearfully approached him, and delivered her through her fear into faith. Life-altering, life-changing, life-giving faith.

Meanwhile, Jairus was still standing there. Scripture doesn't say, but can you imagine what he must have been thinking through all of this? Here he was, having left his daughter's death bed, hoping to get back as quickly as he could with Jesus, his last resort. And Jesus stopped to address someone else in the crowd as "daughter." Jairus must have been on the brink of full-on despair.

It wasn't a moment later that Jairus' worst fear came true. While Jesus was speaking to the woman, people came from Jairus' house, announcing that his daughter had died. And taking a shot at offering their so-called wisdom, they said to Jairus, "Why trouble the Teacher any further?" (5:35) It was too late. I don't know of worse news Jairus could have received. That has to be the worse news any parent can possibly hear. That their child has died.

But just as he did for the woman in the crowd, Jesus takes the opportunity to single out Jairus to address *his* fears. Mark says Jesus overheard what these people said. The word there could also mean that he *ignored* what they said. Either way, Jesus was directing the attention of Jairus away from those who only spoke to Jairus' fears, and directed Jairus to himself, and to *his* words. And Jesus said to him, "Do not fear, only believe."

Jesus was about to take Jairus through his worst fears, and deliver him into faith. When they arrived at his house, the funeral commotion had already started, weeping and wailing. This crowd only paused long enough to mock Jesus with laughter when he explained, "The child is not dead but sleeping" (5:39). She was in fact dead, but Jesus knew that in him, death is but a rest and a sleep for those who believe.

Jesus invited Jairus and his wife, and taking with him only three disciples, and dismissing everyone else, Jesus approached this little child, who had succumbed to the tragedy of disease and death that pollutes this world, and said to her, "'Talitha cumi,' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise,'" (5:41). Mark says that those five people gathered around this child were immediately overcome with amazement. Literally, they were "out of their minds with ecstatic

joy"! Jesus had just delivered Jairus, and his wife, and his little girl, through their fear, into faith. Life-altering, life-changing, life-giving faith.

There are so many things in our lives that cause us to fear. What is it that *you* fear most? Perhaps like Jairus, something has come upon you or your family so quickly, so powerfully, that it's all you can do to keep yourself from being overwhelmed and utterly afraid. A call, an email, or a conversation that has turned your world upside down – a loss of a job, a debilitating injury, a severe change in your financial situation, news that you're about to lose or have just lost someone dear to you. The news that, whatever your greatest fear was, it has now come true.

Or perhaps you're like the woman in the crowd, long-suffering, with things only getting worse. The toll that time takes on you is wearing you down, as you cope with the fear that things aren't getting any better – a career path that takes so much out of you or your family, a relationship you've worked at for years only breaking down even more, a fear for your country or for society, a disease exacting more and more from you or from someone you love each day, a recognition that time and age slows for no one, not even you.

And that's our greatest fear as humans, isn't it? The sobering recognition that we are no exception to the wages that sin takes? That not only are we sinful, but that we are also mortal? We will all have to face the end of our lives here on earth, and we also will have to contend with what our existence after death will be. And how will God judge us for our lives here on earth? Will He consider us faithful after all is said and done? Or do we only have more to fear?

That's what Jesus addresses for you here today. You see, by his miraculous power as Lord, Jesus invited both the woman and Jairus into a fuller understanding of what life is like in his kingdom, in his reign and rule as King. And by doing so, he delivered them through their fears into faith. You are offered such a glimpse, and you have been delivered into such a faith, as well.

Jesus has taken all your sinful fears, the instances where you lack the faith to trust that God has taken care of everything that could cause you harm, in this life or the next, and he took them with him to the cross. He died there as the *faithful* one, to suffer for your *faithlessness*. But Jesus did not succumb to death. He rose again and announced his victory over sin and death, *and* over all your fears.

Death could not hold the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and he promises it will not hold you, either. Your fears will not hold you. Jesus has defeated your fears, your fear of sin, fear of death, fear of judgment. And through the waters of Baptism, where Jesus restored you as a daughter or a son of the living God, you were delivered into faith. Life-altering, life-changing, life-giving faith.

Your faith, which is a gift from God in your Baptism, is so crucial. Because the faith that you've been given is the thing that clings to promises of God, especially when you are surrounded by fearful things. Faith is that which enables you to live in the reign and rule of Jesus the King, even when there are moments that things seem out of control. Faith looks forward to the day when all the struggles and pain caused by sin and death will be no more. Faith even enables you to face the day when death will seem to lay its claim over you, and instead of fear, you will have peace, as you hear Jesus say to you, "Do not fear, only believe."

That kind of faith was expressed in the last stanza of our sermon hymn: "Death's power holds us still in thrall and bears us toward the tomb. Death's dark'ning cloud hangs like a pall that threatens earth with doom. But You have broken death's embrace and torn away its sting. Restore to life our mortal race! Raise us, O Risen King!"

Our Risen King will return, and when he does, he will look at you, your body, and proclaim that you are not dead, only resting. And he take you by the hand and will say, “My child, I say to you, arise.” And on that day, you will know, you will see, you will experience what it’s like to be fully delivered by Jesus from all your fears, what it’s like to be delivered by him into the fulfillment of your faith in the eternal and resurrected life that you’ve been given.

And while we wait for that day, we are not fearful. For we are able to take the words of our Old Testament reading from Lamentations as our own: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’ The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” (3:22-26). We need not fear, for we have been delivered into faith, and by faith, we wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.