

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

June 27, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year B, Proper 8: Deuteronomy 15:7–11; Psalm 112; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9, 13–15;

*Mark 5:22–43**

Earlier this week, when I looked at the lessons for today, I thought I would follow the lectionary and omit the story of the Healing of the Woman in a Flow of Blood, that the evangelist we know as Mark has inserted in the middle of telling the story of the Raising of Jairus' Daughter. Mark inserts stories in the middle of telling another story to help us understand what he wants to know. Like the repeated use of the word "immediately." Raymond Brown wrote this device was "called inelegantly the "Marcan sandwich."¹

When I checked my sermon file, I didn't preach on this gospel in 2018, but I did in 2015, and I preached on the whole thing. Women are too often left out of the biblical narrative. The woman in this story is determined to be well. Father Pete Powell often speaks in his sermons about the privileged position of the poor in the gospel. That's another reason not to forget her story today.

But we begin with the "Jewish crowd and a Jewish leader."² They are there because they have heard about Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick. The leader has an immediate purpose: his daughter is dying. In his commentary on Mark, Joel Marcus writes, "There is at least *one* among the Jewish elite who has been led by a combination of insight and desperation to seek [Jesus'] help."³

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 130–31.

² Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, Anchor Bible 27 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 365.

³ *Ibid.*

Jairus is not the only parent in Mark who will seek Jesus' help to heal his or her child. The following story along these lines is of a Gentile woman. Her plea, "Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs," changes Jesus' mind, and he heals her daughter.⁴ The last is the story of a father with an epileptic son whom his disciples could not heal. Jesus casts out "the unclean spirit."⁵ There is no parent whose child is gravely ill does not grieve for his or her child. As a pastor, I've never known any parent who has been able entirely to move past the loss of a child of any age.

So, Jairus is in the crowd. He falls at Jesus' feet—the ancient gesture of worshipping—and says, "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."⁶ Jesus decides to go with him. It turns out Jesus is in no rush.

I like Marcus' translation of the inserted story. He follows the Greek in giving us a series of seven participles before giving us the verb. [quote] "And a woman *being* in a flow of blood for twelve years, and *having endured* many treatments from many doctors, and *having spent* all her money on them and not *having benefited* at all but rather *having gotten worse, having heard* about Jesus and *having come* behind him in the crowd, ***touched*** his garment.⁷ For she said, 'Even if I just touch his clothes, I'll be cured.'⁸

Marcus could have translated the last word of her last sentence by using the first definition of the Greek verb here, "Even if I just touch his clothes, I'll be saved."⁹ However, he does put the word "saved" on Jesus' lips when Jesus says to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be well."¹⁰

⁴ Mark 7:28.

⁵ Mark 9:14–29.

⁶ Mark 5:23.

⁷ Mark 5:25–27. Marcus, 367. Italics and emphasis by Marcus.

⁸ Mark 5:28, Ibid., 355.

⁹ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), *s.v.* "σώζω." 982–83.

¹⁰ Mark 5:34, Ibid.

In Jairus' home, the professional mourners are there. They know the girl is dead. Stopping to heal the woman probably made the father crazy. When people arrive to tell Jairus that his daughter is dead, Jesus ignores them. He says to [Jairus], "Don't be afraid, just keep on believing."¹¹

Unclean spirits have no choice but to follow a command from Jesus—wind and sea also obey him.¹² But like the woman who touched Jesus' garment, Jairus had a choice to risk hope and followed the One who identifies himself in John's gospel as "Resurrection" and "Life."¹³

As an undergraduate, I was a philosophy major. In a course taught by a professor whose disciplines were ancient philosophy and metaphysics—that is, thinking about the nature of being—the question of altruism was discussed.¹⁴ At some point, aware that he and his wife had a young child, I suggested that it was entirely natural for an adult to be engaged by a child's face and smile. It's an effortless gesture for an adult. But for a young child who is learning to enjoy smiling, the smile brings the child much more joy than an adult. I don't want to go around in philosophical circles about whether such a gesture is only made out of self-interest. I think that kind of engagement with a child may have more to do with nature than nurture.

That said, many things come our way in life that are entirely unexpected and for which we can never prepare. My mother and her brothers' cousins were all farmers in rural North Carolina on their dad's side. Pretty successful. The farm cousins of their generation all had Parkinson's disease. My mother and her brothers all developed Alzheimer's disease. The risk for developing these conditions seems to be hereditary. More women have Alzheimer's, men, Parkinson's.

¹¹ Mark 5:36, Ibid.

¹² Mark 4:41.

¹³ John 11:25.

¹⁴ Alisdair MacIntyre, "Egoism and Altruism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, vols. 1 & 2, (New York: Macmillan Publishing & the Free Press, 1967), II:462–66.

Jesus' words have helped to draw all of us here today. Words of Scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives have the power to reach into human hearts and minds and nurture our hope and faith.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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