

Stealing a Healing
July 1, 2018 Mark 5:21-43

A quick question, just so I can gauge where we're all at this morning:

Show of hands: Who here feels like you've really "got it all together"?

You're on top of your game, feeling good about yourself, achieving all your goals?

So, the fact is that few of us feels like we've "got it all together", but don't we have a hard time admitting it?

It's scary to feel vulnerable because someone might take advantage of us.

Or maybe we feel that we don't have the luxury of admitting that we don't have it all together because people are counting on us and we don't want to let them down.

Or, maybe you're pretty sure that not being on top of everything is simply not an option in your world.

To be a success, you think you have to be competent at everything 24/7, and, yes, that's exhausting – but what's the alternative?

Well, if any of those things resonate with you, then today's passage from Mark 5 is for you because we encounter two very different people who definitely don't "have it all together".

Before we meet them, let's step back for a minute to remember how we arrived here.

First of all, recall that Mark is the first narrative gospel written, written about thirty-five years after Jesus' crucifixion.

There was at least one other gospel circulating, but it was only a list of Jesus' sayings, one after another.

Mark wanted to give context to those sayings, so he put them into memories of what Jesus had done.

His gospel is short, compact and fast moving – he doesn't waste a word, so every story has a purpose.

A few weeks ago, we learned that Jesus' mission in Mark's gospel is to reclaim the world from the evil strongman who has taken possession of.

Mark 3:26-27 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.

What does it look like to bind and evict Satan's stronghold on the world?

Well, that's what follows in the Gospel.

Through his teachings, miracles and sacrifice, Jesus illustrates how we can join him in reclaiming God's world.

Along the way, Jesus got in trouble with the legalists of his time, but his popularity kept growing among the Jews of Galilee.

Then one night he abruptly ordered his disciples into a small boat for a surprise journey across the Sea to the ritually unclean and forbidden territory of the Gentiles.

Although it was only eight or nine miles away, it is safe to say that no faithful Jew had ever set foot there.

The demons apparently understood the significance of this trip and so they roared in opposition, thrashing the waters and nearly sinking the boat, but Jesus prevailed.

Along with us, his disciples were learning the power of Jesus:

Mark 4:41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Ever wonder why Jesus wanted to travel to the Gentile region?

Didn't he already have a full caseload?

Weren't there enough diseases among the Jews to keep him busy?

Since Mark didn't waste any words, you know there was a good reason for reporting this dangerous trip.

It was like the Son of God was saying to his critics, "You're upset because we ate some grain and I healed a withered hand on the Sabbath, *well you ain't seen nothing yet.*"

"Now I'm heading right into those unholy cities with the same message of hope and the same gifts of healing as I've brought to our own people."

Is there no one who's not valued by Jesus?

So, Mark reports this hazardous trip to demonstrate how Jesus intended to break through all the social and religious barriers that divide us so he can bring God's love to all people.

Once on the Gentile side of the lake, Jesus immediately encountered a demon-possessed man, so far gone that even his own kin had abandoned him.

Jesus cast out those demons, commissioned the man to spread the word about God's mercy, and then returned home.

But as he stepped off their boat, he was engulfed by desperate people who had been waiting for his return.

Mark 5:22-24a Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him.

Synagogue ruler was a lay position, someone responsible for administration, upkeep of the building and oversight of the worship.

Jairus would be a man of high status, and he must have been especially important because Mark mentioned him by name, not just his title - one of the few characters named in this gospel.

It's likely that the rabbi of his synagogue had been involved in summoning the scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem to interrogate Jesus.

But faced with the critical illness of his 12-year-old daughter, all his status and quibbles about holiness meant nothing, and so Jairus fell at Jesus' feet.

Jesus wastes no time and hurries to the girl's bedside.

Now Mark again employs his trademark "sandwich" narrative style where he interrupts the action of his first story with the sudden appearance of a second one.

Just as we're wondering if Jesus will reach the girl in time, the story is interrupted by the appearance of another desperate person, this time not a respected man but a disenfranchised woman whose name is not worthy of mention.

Mark 5:25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.

Mark makes note that she's been suffering for twelve years, an indicator that he intends for us to read this and the account of twelve-year-old girl in light of one another.

She had taken a great risk in approaching Jesus.

Leviticus 15 has a lengthy set of regulations declaring that a woman with discharge is unclean – and that anyone who touches her, her clothes or anything she had touched would become unclean as well.

This was such a stigma that some of the rabbinic writings used the word "banished" to label women in her condition.

She would not be allowed to even set foot in the outer courts of the Temple, and if her bleeding extended beyond her normal monthly cycle, she would have to largely keep to herself until the discharge ended, then wait the prescribed eight days before taking two sacrificial doves to the priest to be declared acceptable again.

We've run some Facebook ads saying, "Jesus doesn't care if you are young or old, gay or straight, black or white ... but he does care that you love your neighbor as yourself."

We've gotten overwhelmingly favorable responses, but there were a few people who felt obligated to toss scripture at us about man laying with man being forbidden.

But somehow no one has ever quoted Leviticus 15 to us, you know, the one saying that women cannot enter church during their menstrual cycle.

In any case, this woman knew that she was violating big time rules by even being in the crowd.

If found out, everyone who'd even brushed against her would have to bathe, wash their clothes and wait until evening to rid themselves of her contamination.

Whereas Jairus could push through the crowd to get Jesus' attention, the unnamed woman had to sneak behind Jesus and just touch his robe hoping that she would go unnoticed.

As we heard from Priscilla's reading a few minutes ago, Jesus sensed the power flowing from him.

She was humiliated and terrified.

Mark 5:33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.

What would the rabbi do?

Curse her for her uncleanness?

Chastise her for draining his power that he needed for healing the important person's daughter?

You see, some people believed that healing power was like a battery – there was a finite amount that needed to be rationed.

Instead, Jesus goes out of his way to see her and then blesses her by indirectly referring to what had happened at the end of chapter 3 – see if you recognize it:

Mark 5:34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

He could have said, "Woman, your faith has healed you," but he chose to call her "daughter".

Remember at the end of chapter 3, Jesus redefined the meaning of family to "whoever does God's will".

This nameless woman had chosen the chance of healing over obedience to holiness codes and had asserted her worth over the dismissive attitudes of her culture, and had thereby demonstrated Jesus' idea of faith.

She entered the crowd as poor, broken and unclean – but through Jesus she was physically healed, allowed to re-integrate with her community, and recognized as a valued member of the family of God.

But in Mark, there is no time to linger.

No sooner has she been blessed than word of Jairus daughter's death arrives.

Mark 5:35 While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?"

Now Jesus does something unexpected: He continues to the girl's bedside.

Why was this unexpected?

Well first, of course, is that she appeared to be beyond the point of healing.

Not the most sensitive way to deliver this tragic news, but they had a point.

There were lots of people needing Jesus' attention – wouldn't his time be better spent elsewhere?

But the second surprise was that Jesus was now going toward what everyone assumed was a corpse – as ritually unclean as the hemorrhaging woman.

That's three accounts in a row showing three different ways that Jesus steps beyond legalism in order to show love and inclusion to a variety of people ... to show that they are all God's people.

Mark 5:36 Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe." or as some translations put it, keep on believing.

There was commotion surrounding the girl's house when they arrived, caused by the wailing of professional mourners.

Professional mourners are mentioned many times in the Old Testament.

People who were particularly good at wailing and moaning found the most work.

Some professional mourners were farmers who were done for the season and took this on as a side job.

Anyway, they saw the situation as hopeless and so they scoffed at Jesus.

But Jesus is undeterred.

Now we just saw from the boat in the stormy sea narrative that Jesus only had to speak his word to call forth a miracle, but instead he does this:

Mark 5:40b-41 ... *he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"*

So, what is he teaching in this moment beyond the miracle itself?

Well first is the personal nature of his healing.

There is a long tradition of televangelists who promise miraculous healings, sometimes for people who just place their hands on the TV screen.

Famously, Peter Popoff claimed to heal people whose address and the nature of their disease he claimed to be divinely given while he was on being broadcast.

He grew a large and prosperous following until his technique of hidden earpieces and radio messages was revealed.

But this is so different from the intimate scene here where Jesus gathers the family in a close room and takes the hand of the ailing girl.

Many of Jesus' miracles and teachings conclude with pithy statements like

Mark 2:17 *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Or, Mark 2:27 *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*

But this account is different.

Here he just says to bring the recovering girl some food.

Some speculate that this was to prove that she was not a phantom but a living breathing person, but it also shows Jesus' practical, personal care for people.

I appreciate the personal care and concern that you have shown Jimmy during his long stay in the hospital.

It is natural to see someone with a serious genetic disorder as being so different from us that we do not even remember that they have the same human feelings we have.

It is natural to turn away from someone with birth defects.

It is natural to be so overwhelmed by the burden a parent like Vicki has to shoulder that we avoid the thought altogether.

I don't recall ever seeing Jimmy cry before this particular surgery – he has a high tolerance for pain, and he has a lot of hospital experience.

But during the past couple of weeks I have seen him cry or heard about his tears more than once.

The first time was when doctors were struggling to get his oxygen levels up and he had a nasal tube, a breathing tube and a large raw surgical wound.

It was all too much.

And you were there for him.

Text messages, Facetime and prayers when actual visitors weren't allowed.

There was the care basket that the Mercies Team, through Mary Miller, gave to Vicki so that she'd have supplies and treats to sustain her through the long days and nights at the hospital.

And then were tears when Jimmy saw pictures of the people he knows from our congregation and the video of our singing last week.

Why?

Because when Jimmy comes to church, you make a personal connection with him.

You sometimes may not know if he understands what you've said to him, you may not understand what he is trying to say to you ... but you make eye contact, you touch him, you reach-out to him.

And, you know, when I read the gospel I realize that that's what Jesus did.