

Psalm 130  
Mark 5:21-43

### THE STORY WITHIN

One day in early August of 2004, my son, Andrew, called to tell me that he had Friday off, and he wanted to know if I could meet him in Charlottesville and spend the day together hiking in the Shenandoah National Park. I told him that would be fun but there was a lot going on; money was tight; and, I had to drive to Lynchburg on Saturday for an all-day meeting. Andrew understood; we talked a while more and then we said our goodbyes and hung up. I said to Monica, “How neat is that that Andrew called and wanted me to go on a hike with him; I wish I could go with him.” And Monica responded, “Well, what’s keeping you from going on the hike?” We talked a while longer and then I called Andrew back. He was surprised to hear my voice as we had just talked fifteen minutes earlier. I said to him, “Hey, is your offer still on the table about meeting in Charlottesville on Friday and going for a hike?” He quickly said yes, and we made the necessary arrangements.

That Friday, during our hike, Andrew said to me, “Hey, Dad, I met this girl named Sarah recently and she has agreed to go on a date with me. I’m a little nervous but I’m really excited that she seems to like me and wants to go out with me.” And the rest is family history as Andrew and Sarah married a little over two years later. I rejoice in that delightful memory and that I didn’t miss out on that wonderful day of being with my son and hearing all about this Sarah, who, in time, became our beloved daughter-in-law.

I mention this because one of the mottos I live by is: “Plan your work and work your plan.” That’s my intended goal; and yet, with life in general and ministry in particular, there has to be some flexibility, a willingness to change course in order to accommodate an unexpected turn of events within those carefully organized plans.

In today’s Gospel lesson, we see Jesus dealing creatively with the interruptions in his own life. The Gospel-writer Mark likes to use the word *immediately* because he wants to convey a real sense of urgency about the kingdom of God to his audience. Jesus moves from place to place, attentive to the situations at hand and then he moves on to what’s in store for him. In Mark, Jesus speaks very little; there are no long discourses or prayers. Mark is fast-paced; it’s a gospel of action.

And yet, Jesus isn’t so busy that he hurries right by people in need. He makes time and takes time for those, who reach out to him with cries of “Help!” Jesus had just stepped off the boat, when a large crowd gathered around him. A leader of the synagogue, Jairus, pleaded with Jesus to lay his hand on his daughter, who was near death, so that she might be made well. So Jesus went with Jairus.

Here’s where the story picks up the pace and builds on the drama for there is a story within the first story. En route, as Jesus passed through the crowd a woman, who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years, reached out to touch Jesus (or at least his clothes) in the hope that she would be made well. She was desperate and at wit’s end - she had lived with this physical condition for twelve very long years, she had been to many physicians, had spent all her money, and was no better but grew worse. Furthermore, her “unclean” condition made it necessary for her to live in isolation from her community. She reached out and touched Jesus, and immediately (there’s Mark’s favorite word!) her hemorrhage stopped and she was healed of her disease.

Jesus was immediately aware that power had just gone forth from him; he wanted to know who had touched his clothes. The disciples wanted to keep on moving but Jesus was insistent. Finally the woman came clean and told Jesus the whole truth. With compassion, Jesus called her “Daughter” and he told her, “Your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” She was restored not only to good health but her designation as “Daughter” meant she was restored to the community as well.

Meanwhile, back to the first story. Due to the interruption, some people came from Jairus’ house and told him that his daughter had died. Jesus overheard them and counseled Jairus, “Do not give in to fear; just believe.” When they came to the house, the mourners were in full swing. When Jesus informed them that the child was not dead but asleep, they laughed at him in derision, which in turn got them booted outside. Jesus took the girl’s parents and three disciples to the room where the child was. He touched her still body and said, “Little girl, get up!” and immediately (that’s the third time if you’re counting) the girl got up, walked around, and was given something to eat.

Within both stories, we see how Jesus bent the rules in order to restore the woman to health and the young girl to life. Both of these children of God were precious to Jesus. And, while being touched by a bleeding woman and then touching a dead girl made Jesus ritually defiled according to Jewish law, nevertheless, their need for healing and restoration meant more to Jesus than his purity. And so he acted on their behalf.

I think both of these stories track a parallel course with the Lazarus story in chapter eleven of John’s Gospel. In other words, both the raising of Lazarus and these two stories are preludes that point to Jesus as the One who is raised from the dead. Furthermore, Jesus is the One who raises others from the dead. And, it is precisely here that the Good News of the Gospel intersects with our own lives and addresses the story within each one of us. The good news is that Jesus still does that today; he can and he does resurrect people to new, abundant, and eternal life.

Whether told or untold, each and every one of us has a story within us filled with disappointments and pain, suffering and sin, disease of body and/or spirit and the ever-present threat of death. No one is immune to the storms of life that rage within us and tend to drag us down. And yet, if we come to Jesus with what little faith we have – like Jairus pleading his case to Jesus to touch his daughter so that she may be made well, like the woman who needed only to touch Jesus’ clothes in order to be made well – there is unity when God’s power and human faith come together. God’s faithfulness envelops whatever meager amount of faith we can muster, and the door of possibilities is thrown open wide and things begin to happen.

Sometimes it is possible that Lazarus, the woman, the little girl, you or someone you love are healed and restored fully to life. As we think back over our own lives, how many times have we rebounded from a serious injury, illness or accident? We marvel at the grace of God and the resiliency of the human body to be healed and made well.

And, truth be told, sometimes we (or those we love) do not experience the physical healing we were hoping and praying for and expecting to take place. What then? Faith doesn’t always guarantee physical wellness; however, faith can and will break the death-grip of fear. If we reach out to God in faith, then we are restored, reconnected to the very Source of life and hope and love. The woman in today’s lesson stopped bleeding. But Jesus didn’t stop there. He finds her, calls her “Daughter,” and gives her back to the community – so that she no longer feels alone, cut off from others.

And, in raising Jairus' daughter from the dead, Jesus wows us with an impossible feat. But the point of the miracle is not the resuscitation – rather, it's the restored relationship between the parents and their little girl. Faith reconnects us with God and centers us in the loving Presence of the Lord our God. Faith assures us of God's compassion, presence and power; we are not left to our own devices. Rather, we can lean into and rely upon the everlasting arms of our heavenly Father. And, faith leads us into community where we can draw strength from others, especially when we are weak or down.

Sometimes, healing does not take place, and death intrudes on our lives or upon those we love. Without faith, we would be both helpless and hopeless. However, faith in the risen Lord Jesus gives us hope, and light and life issue forth! Christ's victory over death is our victory and God's love lives on in our lives for all eternity. Here and hereafter is the real story within our lives. God has the last word for the Word made flesh, who was crucified and then raised from the dead, has trumped death and trampled its power. We are not diminished by death. Rather, just as Jesus transformed the crown of thorns into a crown of righteousness, so Christ has enhanced our lives before and beyond death. When we die, or when our loved ones die, Christ will come and say, "Get up!" and we will! While death is the ending of our physical life on earth, death also serves to open another door that leads us ultimately to our heavenly home in the full Presence of God and of all the saints within the Church triumphant.

It is this faith in Christ that has the power to heal and make us well. This faith is what is needed for us to get up and go in peace, even in the midst of the storms of life or in the midst of death. This faith alone heals us of our sinful disease and ushers us into our eternal home and the embrace of the God of love.

Some time ago, Elizabeth Achtemeier wrote: "Shortly after World War II, my husband and I were graduate divinity students at Heidelberg University in Germany. During a vacation from our university classes, we rode our bicycles from southern Germany up to Denmark. City after German city that we rode through lay still in ruins from Allied bombing during the war, and at one place where we stopped to eat our lunch beside the road, there were the shattered stone ruins of a church. Only one wall of the church remained, and on the place where the altar had been, someone had nailed together a wooden cross. But on that remaining wall, an unknown German had chalked the words: 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.' Jesus' promise to his disciples that though we blow up this world so that nothing of it remains, his word, his salvation for his faithful followers, will come to pass." ("Sure Promise," *Pulpit Digest*, November/December 1995, p. 9)

May we go beyond the noise and the chaos of the storms that tend to well up within us and around us. Let us listen intently to the story that has been passed down through the Church for two millennia about Christ Jesus, who died for us and rose again for us. That story, that Good News of the Gospel, is rooted deeply within us. That story calls forth faith within us; and there's enough faith to hear our risen Lord Jesus say to each one of us, "Daughter, Son, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed. Little girl, little boy, get up!" By the grace and power of God, we respond and do his bidding. And, as we walk by faith, we join countless others in giving glory to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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