

We continue with Jesus' travelogue. He has now returned from "the other side" of the lake. Having borne witness of his powers outside of the confines of the Jewish community, he returns. And the Markan themes continue: he is immediately met by a crowd." And yet the focus of the story narrows quickly.

A Jewish leader of the temple parts the crowd and approaches Jesus. His name, we are told, is Jairus (Jy-russ). Now, Jairus isn't just any leader, this is the *archisynagōgos* (arkey-synah-goh-gahs). A job so important that it has 6 syllables! According to the Strong's concordance of biblical Greek, it was the duty of the *arkey-synah-goh-gahs* "to

- **select** the readers or teachers in the synagogue;
- to examine the discourses of the public speakers; and
- to see that all things were done with decency and in accordance with ancestral usage."

(<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G752&t=KJV>)

Jairus is a big deal in the established religious community!

Jesus is a rogue teacher/healer.

And yet, Jairus comes to *Jesus*, in public, bows to him and, Mark says, repeatedly begs Jesus for help: "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."

Clearly this well-positioned man is desperate. Most parents would do anything to save their child's life. But it is significant that Jairus would humble himself in this manner.

While we are on the subject of derivations, the name “Jairus” translates as “whom God enlightens.” In my estimation, this name has a double-meaning. On the one hand, God enlightens Jairus to bring to synagogue facilitators and content that will faithfully transmit the word of God; so the congregation will be taught the Torah with proper authority. On the other hand, Jairus is in position to have his own understanding of the Torah be enlightened through his encounter with God, in Jesus.

One thing Jairus shows, though, is that he seems to **have faith** in Jesus. Desperate or not, he comes believing that Jesus will be able to do something about his daughter’s life-or-death situation.

Before we are able to see how this story resolves, however, another one interrupts. Jesus has consented to go to Jairus’ home, and as they go, the crowd seems to be growing; so much so that Mark describes it as “pressing in on them.” The focus then centers on an unnamed woman.

If we have “ears to hear,” we will pick up on the overt contrast with this character as opposed to Jairus. He is...well...a “he.” Jairus is named. Jairus has no qualms going directly to Jesus to ask for assistance for his daughter. He is his daughter’s advocate.

Mark allows that the woman’s experience is quite different - she has been suffering from a disorder that has caused an incessant menstrual bleeding for 12 years. Mark tells us that she has sought the advice and assistance of

doctors, who have not only not been able to heal her, they have actually made her condition worse! She, like Jairus on behalf of her daughter, is desperate. However, she has no one to advocate for her. She must take matters into her own hands.

Mark allows us into her thought process: As she nears Jesus she thinks, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Like Jairus, she comes to Jesus **in faith**, believing that Jesus will be able to do something about *her* life-or-death situation. And it is life or death - along with her anemic condition, her blood flow would have caused her to be ostracized from the community. At the very least she would have been pushed to the margins of society...cast aside. She very well could have seen this as a last resort. Just try and imagine!

She touches Jesus' cloak, and in classic Markan fashion she is healed *immediately*. Her plan worked flawlessly - except for one problem...HE NOTICED.

Everything in this story is about forward momentum - once Jesus accepts the request to go to the *archisynagōgos*' house, the train sets off and is in full motion...Jesus and Jairus and the disciples and the crowd all movin' and groovin' until...ZAP! Jesus felt the power go right out from him...and he stopped...and the train screeched to a halt.

"Somebody touched me," he exclaimed.

"What?" says a disciple.

"Somebody touched me," he repeated. And added, "Who touched me?"

The disciples laugh, and say “Master, look around, there is a large crowd - such that we’re being jostled. Of course someone touched you!”

Jesus kept looking...

..and then, she stepped forward

Then, just as the archisynagōgos did, she got low...actually in both accounts the Greek says that they “**fell**” before him. I can imagine the myriad of emotions that must have come out in that moment. Mark tells us that she came in fear and trembling - but once Jesus either stooped down next to her, or brought her up to her feet, to look her in the eyes, she relaxed. And Mark tells us she told him the whole truth. The...whole...truth. About her bleeding. About the doctors who were glad to take her payments, even though their counsel made her worse. She would have told Jesus what the last 12 years had been like - how she barely felt human. He would have taken the time to hear her out...like they were the only two people in the world. In his full attention, her healing would have progressed all the more...not so much her body, but her soul. The crowd would have taken this in...they would have seen her faith...they would have seen how Jesus responded to her faith...in that moment faith was alive and spreading.

Just as Jesus is about to speak the words of conclusion, fully integrating this woman back into the community, a messenger from Jairus’ house comes to him and speaks. Mark does something very interesting here. The messenger speaks to Jairus, just as Jesus is speaking to the woman - and a single word is shared by both speakers:

Jesus: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Messenger: “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?”

In the superposing of the two messages, I wonder what Jairus heard: “faith has made **your daughter** well”? Jesus allows Jairus to take heart - “Do not fear, only believe,” he says to him, and leaving the crowd behind, he travelled the rest of the way solely with Jairus, and his troika of disciples - Peter, James, and John. Jesus’ words to Jairus bear repeating:

Do not fear, only believe.

It strikes me that this is the gospel in sum.

Arriving at Jairus’ residence, the group finds the household in deep grief. Their mourning turns to derision at Jesus’ insistence that the girl only “sleeps” (5:39). Jesus is not being coy; “being asleep” will emerge later in the story as a symbol of lack of faith. Due to the “dead faith” so apparent in that house, Jesus throws out the onlookers and proceeds into the girl’s room with a small group: those who originally gave her life--her parents--and the three disciples. It will be within those walls where faith will be resurrected, along with the girl.

Indeed, Jesus addresses the dead girl, speaking to her in the local, familiar language of Aramaic, calling for her to get up. And immediately she does. Mark tells us that the witnesses are “beside themselves with great astonishment”

(5:42); this is a reaction that will occur only one other time in Mark: at Jesus' resurrection (16:8).

(adapted from *Say to This Mountain: Mark's Story of Discipleship*, by Ched Myers, Stuart Taylor, Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda)

Just by walking out of her room, the girl bears witness to the power of God in Jesus, "awakening" the faith of everyone who had previously been grieving her death. At the conclusion of the story, the girl is brought back into the community in the most normal of fashions, through a meal...a ritual of life-giving nourishment.

A deeper read into this story will allow us to see two connections in the subjects of Jesus' life-giving activity. Both are female. One suffering from a bleeding disorder for 12 years, the other 12 years old. 12 is a number of wholeness and completeness in scripture - it is also the number of the tribes of Israel, and, of course, the disciples. Other than these connecting points, the situations of the woman and girl are quite different. One is living outside of the community of faith, while the other, by her father's standing, is living, quite literally at its center. One is privileged - one is outcast. It is obvious that for Mark, the one story needed to interrupt the other. One commentator, Ched Myers, has said there is great purpose in their stories being interwoven:

Within the "family" of Israel, these "daughters" represent the privileged and the impoverished, respectively. Because of such inequity, the body politic of the synagogue is "on the verge of death."

The healing journey must, however, take a necessary detour that stops to listen to the pain of the crowd. Only when the outcast woman is restored to true "daughterhood" can the daughter of the synagogue be restored to true life. That is the faith the privileged must learn from the poor. This story thus shows a characteristic of the sovereignty of God that Jesus will later address: The "last will be first" and the "least will be greatest." (Ibid)

During this past week, John Becker shared with me an article from *The Christian Century*. Authored by Amy Peterson, it is titled Kindness, kinship, and the boundaries of justice; it's tagline is "The virtue of kindness depends on who we see as kin." John said he thought of me because of the shift I've made from using language of the "Kingdom of God" to the "Kin-dom of God." There are many interesting points that Peterson makes in the article, but for the purposes of this sermon I just want to tag her connection between the words "kind" and "kin."

In Middle English ... the words 'kind' and 'kin' were the same—to say that Christ is 'our kinde Lord' is not to say that Christ is tender and gentle, although that may be implied, but to say that he is kin—our kind.

...To be kind meant to be kin. The word unfolded in my mind. God's kindness meant precisely that God became my kin—Jesus, my brother—and this...was a foundational truth about who I was. ...

But what did that mean for the people around me? I was happy to be the sister of Christ but less than thrilled to admit kinship with all humanity; that would make me related to that guy wearing too much cologne at the

soccer game, the kid who hit my kid at recess, the woman flirting with my husband in the park, the racist troll I blocked on Twitter, the boss who fired me when he found out I was pregnant, the neighbor who did target practice in his backyard when I was trying to sleep. I would prefer not to call these people my siblings. I would prefer to distinguish myself from them, to say I'm not that kind of person. But, in fact, I am exactly that kind: we are kin. ...Practicing kindness requires, at minimum, a willingness to see the image of God in, and to find a point of honest connection with, every person.

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/first-person/kindness-kinship-and-boundaries-justice>

Herein lies the mastery of Mark's weaving of the bringing-to-life of the woman and the girl. In no other instances of their existence would they be bound together...but only in the Kingdom Jesus was building. On that day, those two "daughters" were made sisters of a kind - pulled together into the family of God, through the kindness (or, is it the kin-ness?) of Jesus.

As we gather around this table today, I want us all to recognize the siblings we see before us. But I hope we will also think about all the others whom Christ has called to the table, building equity through the ages. **All of us requiring the other to bring our faith alive**, and helping us be witnesses to Christ's open-hearted compassion to all. Indeed, thanks be to God. Amen.