

"FAITH THAT DEFIES DEFEAT: YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Texts for the Sermon: Mark 5:21-34

Introduction

Our journey with Jesus takes us back across the Sea of Galilee to Jewish territory on the west side of the lake where Jesus receives a much friendlier reception and a crowd quickly gathers. Mark tells the story of two people who make a special point of coming to Jesus.

Notice how accessible Jesus is. Notice that He's among the people, in the crowds, able to be touched. His entire ministry was on the streets and hills of Palestine and in the homes and synagogues of the people. The crowds sometimes kept Him from being able to eat and sleep and retreat for prayer, but He was accessible. He always has been and He still is.

But He is not only accessible, He's available and beyond that, He's interruptible.

This is the third time in this Gospel where we have a story interrupted by another story. Bible commentators like to call these Mark sandwich stories. This time we are going to look at the meat of the sandwich and next week at the two pieces of bread that surround this story within a story, this miracle within a miracle.

These two stories aren't just your average bad day stories. These are two people in the depths of despair. One is of a young girl at the point of death, and the other is a woman at the point of utter hopelessness from a long-lasting medical condition. This woman's condition is far worse than we first realize for three reasons.

Mark 5:25-34.

Mark 5:25 There was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, [26] and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.

First, she has suffered from a constant flow of blood for 12 years. She was no doubt weak and anemic, exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally. There was no small amount of embarrassment and inconvenience associated with her affliction. For twelve years she has not known a day free from her infirmity. She has suffered greatly.

Second, she has suffered much at the hands of many physicians. She has spent incredible time, energy and money seeking a remedy for these past 12 years. And all she had to show for it was poverty and being worse off. She not only suffered from her disease but she also suffered from the cures. She is in despair over the utter hopelessness of our situation.

Just as a little side note, are you aware of how fortunate and blessed we are to live in the time of modern medicine. Before the mid 1700's there were really no real cures for any diseases. They didn't have the science to understand disease and bacterial and viruses.

According to the Jewish Talmud the suggested remedy for a woman who had this problem was to carry the ashes of an ostrich egg in a linen bag in the summer, and to carry the ashes of an ostrich egg in a cotton bag in the winter. Or carry a barley corn found in donkey dung, or drink wine with alum and crocuses or wine with onions from Persia. No wonder she was still sick.

Third, a woman in this condition was considered by Mosaic law to be ceremonially unclean. She could not enter the area around the temple for all these past 12 years. Furthermore she constantly had to make your condition known to everyone around her because to touch her would make them ceremonially unclean as well.

Leviticus 15:19 “When a woman has a discharge, and the discharge in her body is blood, she shall be in her menstrual impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening.

Leviticus 15:25 “If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her menstrual impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness. As in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean. (ESV)

If her husband touched her he was unclean, if her children touched her they were unclean. If she was single, she had no hope of getting married. If a stranger touched her he was unclean. Think of how this impacted her life. She’s a social and religious outcast, shut off and isolated.

This may account for part of her fear to be known. By touching Jesus she was making Him ceremonially unclean and any around her in the crowd she has pushed through. If she touches Jesus and is found out she will be charged with making Him and everyone else she touched to get to him unclean.

She was sick, weak, poor, alone and ostracized, utterly helpless and hopeless. It’s for people like her that Jesus came to earth.

Mark 2:17 “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (ESV)

Notice how Jesus connects the physical and the spiritual.

Her story is our story.

Let me ask how her story relates to us? Can you see yourself in her story? Do you see your own needs in this story? Do you see things over which you have no control, over which you despair and desperately need help for?

We see here the misery of the effects of sin. Not just twelve years of effects but a lifetime of sin, pain, affliction, and trouble. The truth is none of us have ever known a day free from the effects of sin in some way.

Her condition is our condition. Sin renders us all unclean and unable to come into the presence of God. Sin make us cast off. Sin puts us in danger of being eternally separated from a holy God, forever without hope or healing. Sin separates us from Christ, alienates us from the people of God, makes us strangers to the promises of the covenant, leaving us with no hope and without God (Ephesians 2:11-12).

The purpose of the OT laws about clean and unclean was to give a constant reminder of the nature and effect of sin, and how it corrupts, pollutes, stains and defiles us and isolates us and alienates us in our relationships with God and each other.

We are conceived in sin and born in sin. We are all diseased, covered in the leprosy of sin. It makes it impossible for us to come into the presence of a holy and clean God.

Our sin makes us sick, it infects and poisons everything in us and about us, our thinking, our acting, our words, our attitudes, our relationships, our work, our very lives to the very core.

May false shepherds have preached many false remedies and have only left people worse off. Like the Pharisees of whom Jesus warned, who make people twice as fit for hell as they are. How many people have searched high and low and in every possible place for peace of mind and security for their souls? They have tried every earthly remedy, but to no avail. In fact they are only worse off.

Those who humble themselves before Christ shall be saved. One small touch, one mustard seed of faith, one look at Jesus, and we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God.

In just an instant the sickness of our souls is healed when we trust Jesus for our salvation. A life time of sin and shame and guilt are washed away in a moment's confession and faith.

This woman who had no merit, no standing, no previous relationship with Jesus, no money to offer to pay for anything, nothing but a huge need, heard a rumor about this Jesus and acted on what she heard with faith. How many are there who hear about Jesus and don't act? She acted, she reached out and touched Jesus and immediately, immediately she was completely healed. "Immediately her discharge of blood ceased" (Luke 8:44).

Twelve years of misery, instantly gone. Twelve years of doctors and the great physician heals her in an instant and says, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Application and conclusion.

All the miracle stories are meant to lead us to true faith and to real discipleship, to love and trust and follow Jesus, because He is God, and worthy of our lives.

Jesus cured physical sicknesses in order to show that He also has both the power and the authority to cure spiritual sicknesses.

Remember His words to the scribes and Pharisees when He healed the paralytic:

Mark 2:8-11 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? [9] Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? [10] But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—[11] "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." (ESV)

This is our call to faith, to believe, to trust and obey, to place our confidence and courage and hope in Jesus whatever your condition, whatever your situation, whatever your trial, whatever the cry of your heart is, whatever your dream or hope is.

He did amazing displays of His power and authority and ability to increase faith and to show that His words are credible and true and should be taken to heart and obeyed.

Today is Ascension Sunday, which reminds us that Jesus has risen to heaven and sits on the throne at the right hand of the Father and has absolute authority over every realm.

Jesus is only person in the world who is able to overcome and defeat sin and evil and their effects. He saves us from sin and evil. So today the question is in what sense does He save us from it? Are we exempt from it? To what extent are we saved from it if evil is still so strong in the world and we are still so effected by it?

Why doesn't Jesus heal all our diseases today? Why doesn't He do that for us to encourage or build our faith? We're clearly not exempt from all kinds of trials and troubles. In fact it would seem just the opposite is the case.

Like the disciples, to be a follower of Jesus beings us face to face with storms, demonic forces and evil, sickness and death. Jesus goes so far to say we will have trouble. Not only is it inevitable it's indispensable. Tribulation is necessary in the Christian life.

Why doesn't Jesus heal all our diseases today? For the same reason He did heal them when He was walking the earth preaching the Gospel, to build our faith, to strengthen our faith and increase our trust and draw us to Himself.

Christians must learn to confront trouble of all kinds and cope with trouble and not be surprised or discouraged by it. It strengthens our faith and weakens our grasp on this temporal world.

1 Peter 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (ESV)

1 Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. [13] But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (ESV)

Acts 14:22 ... through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. (ESV)

We follow one who can and does and will overcome. Our faith is in Him. What He did in the past He is still able to do. And He will do. He will overcome, He will bring good out of evil. Everything that comes from His hand is secure in His hands.

He doesn't always give us what we ask for, but He always gives us what we need.

Let's remember, everything that happens in our lives is personal. When Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" He was saying His power is personal. When and where and why He heals or not is personal.

Jesus isn't just some cosmic force or some impersonal power that emanates in the universe. He is personally involved in all the He powerful controls and influences. When Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus "upholds the universe by the word of His power" it means that He is intimately and personal present and involved.

Paul sees Jesus' power in his life as very personal.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (ESV)

Jesus felt His power flow into us when He saved us. And Jesus feels His power at work in our lives through His Holy Spirit as He sanctifies us. He's personally, emotionally connected and involved. He really is with you and me.

This is why Jesus turns the encounter with the woman personal. We don't just come to Jesus to get something, we come to get someone. He doesn't just give us something, He gives us Himself. Christianity isn't just about getting our needs met, it's about meeting God, about being in the presence of Jesus, about knowing Him and being known by Him.

The curious will gain no benefit from Christ, but only those who come in faith. Crowds fill churches every week, but how many go away with a blessing. What about this crowd? There are hundreds here this morning. Some of you are here for no other reason than just to be here, to go along with the crowd, because this is the right thing to do on Sunday morning. Others of you are here because of a great need and you have come in expectancy, wanting to touch Jesus, expecting Jesus to touch you.

This story is a call to faith. Faith in a personal, accessible, available, interruptible, powerful, present God. Believe on Him, call on His name, fall on your face before Him, humble yourself, confess everything before Him and He will call you son or daughter.

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (ESV)

Prayer: Jesus, through this visible miracle you display your invisible divinity. Through this physical healing you show your power and authority for our spiritual healing. Increase our faith and trust and hope and confidence in you. Increase our faith to come to you and to seek you and to never give up hope in you. Cause the power and truth of your Word to work miracles of faith and healing in our hearts here this morning. Remove every hindrance and every barrier and the lies of the evil one. Grant fruit from our having been in your presence by your Word and Spirit this morning. And may you receive all the glory, honor and praise due your name. Amen.