

Sunday, July 1 and Wednesday, July 4 + 6th week after Pentecost

[Mark 5:21-43](#)

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Marshall, WI

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I know what it's like to work in a newsroom. The floor plan is completely open, no walls, no cubicles, from end to end, corner to corner. This promotes a mentality of "we're all in it together." It also puts the staff in a position of extreme vulnerability if someone managed to get in there with intent to do harm. The closest I ever came to seeing this was when Bob Wills, former editor of the Milwaukee Sentinel, threw, or tried to throw, a typewriter across the room in anger. I can't imagine what it was like for the reporters at the Maryland newspaper a last week who were cowering under their desks as the shooting began, wondering if they were next.

As with all these shooting incidents, there is trauma not only for the families of those killed or injured but also for those who lived through it. It was therefore difficult to view the clip outside the White House later that same day, as President Trump strode across the lawn and brushed off reporters as they called for a comment on the shooting. "Words of condolence?....Nothing?" These weren't just reporters being annoying. These were *reporters*, people who were deeply affected by what had just happened because they knew their newsrooms could be next.

What does it take to get a powerful person's attention? That is where we begin today, in our gospel reading from Mark.

At first glance it looks as if these are simply two healing stories. But look more closely and you'll see that Jesus is once again challenging established systems, upending the status quo in order to create new possibilities for human community. And the way these stories are woven together is part of the message.

First we have Jairus, the powerful ruler of the local synagogue, high on the social ladder, whose 12-year-old daughter is dangerously ill. Then we have a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years, with no money and negative social standing. Not only has her illness made her ritually unclean, but she is impoverished because she has spent all that she had on doctors who still weren't able to cure her.

Let's compare how they approach Jesus. Jairus takes the appropriate posture for someone of his rank. He kneels down at the lakeshore in front of the entire crowd and begs repeatedly for Jesus' help. The hemorrhaging woman, on the other hand, approaches Jesus surreptitiously, secretly, in the crush of the crowd, and takes the initiative of touching Jesus' cloak. Immediately, she is healed. The hemorrhaging stops. The blood dries up.

At the moment this takes place, Jesus has already begun to make his way toward Jairus' house, with the crowds follow right along. What is his response? Does he give precedence to the powerful man of high social standing whose daughter is near death,

knowing that every minute counts? Does he brush off the poor woman as an annoyance and a distraction, as the disciples would have him do?

No. Jesus stops in his tracks. He knows right away that someone has touched him, because he feels power going out of him. He scans the crowd. "Who touched my clothes?" he asks. Imagine the woman's sheer terror. Even so, she falls before him confesses. She probably never expected the response he gives: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

But the delay has a consequence. Messengers come with the news that Jairus' daughter has died. This has no apparent effect on Jesus. He simply instructs Jairus to follow the example of the woman: "Do not fear, only believe."

This poor woman, not Jairus, has become the center of the story. Jesus is lifting her up as an example of faith to the ruler of the synagogue! The one with no money. The one with negative social standing. The one who has been cast out of society because the constant flow of blood made her ritually unclean. The one who dared to touch Jesus and who thus ran the risk, at least in the minds of others, of making him ritually unclean. A person at the bottom of the social scale has intruded upon Jesus' mission to save a family at the top of the ladder. She not only becomes the daughter at the center of the story, but she outshines the disciples themselves, who have just proven themselves to be people of little faith in their perilous journey across the Sea of Galilee.

A few months ago, our WELCA Bible study was asking us who we identify with in a given Bible story. I would wager most of us identify with the woman, not with Jairus. In a stewardship meeting recently we discussed entitlement, and how a sense of entitlement—that the world owes you things—is the beginning of the path toward a miserable life. Jairus, who's probably used to giving orders and having them obeyed, may well have been indignant in the face of the distraction this woman presented. Jesus was on his way to cure his daughter, got sidetracked, and then she died. How dare she! How dare Jesus!

But put yourself in the shoes of this woman. Haven't we all had times when we felt we weren't worthy of asking for help? When we were afflicted in some way, but chose to keep it to ourselves because of our pride, because we were taught to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps? How hard was it for this woman to do what she did? And to take it from another perspective, many of us can probably identify with the fact that she spent all she had on doctors, who not only couldn't cure her illness but actually left her worse off. How often has the medical system failed us and left us feeling desolate and perhaps even destitute, when the Jairuses among us get all the best that the medical profession has to offer?

This reading is telling us that Jesus does attend to us, *even us*, if we but dare reach out to touch the hem of his cloak. Jesus is constantly doing ministry at the margins, dining with sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes. Of course, Jairus did approach Jesus

as well, having begged him for help, and Jesus does go on to raise the child back to life— a more impressive miracle even than if he had simply cured her illness.

In all this, we come to see that that to be saved and live -- not only physical healing but to be restored into full relationship with God — all we need to do is to have faith in Jesus as the one who is bringing in God’s kingdom on earth. The message for the woman is also for each of us: “Go in peace; your faith has made you well.”