

Don't Fear—Just Believe

Mark 5:21-43

John Breon

Jairus felt hope for the first time in days. He had heard that Jesus was back in Capernaum. He'd find Jesus and ask him to come and help. Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter was sick and about to die.

As an elected synagogue official, Jairus was responsible for conducting the service and leading observance of the religious law in the synagogue, the Jewish meeting place. He knew many of the religious leaders didn't approve of Jesus and he should probably stay away from him. But Jairus had heard the stories. He knew some of the people Jesus had healed. His little girl was more important than his reputation or his concern about religious controversy or political danger. So he went to find Jesus.

Across town was a woman who had also heard about Jesus. She'd been suffering for twelve years from almost constant bleeding. Her condition not only made her weak and ill, it also made her religiously unclean. She couldn't go to the temple or synagogue and she was shunned by most people because anyone who touched her would also become unclean.

The many remedies doctors had tried over the years hadn't cured her, but made her suffering worse. She hardly dared to think that Jesus would help her, but she determined to go to him. So she started making her way through town.

This woman had gone twelve years without touching or being touched by another person. There've been studies in modern times about the importance of touch for human thriving. Some years ago there were reports about orphans in Romania who never knew human touch and how frail they were.

More recently, Dr. Dacher Keltner has claimed that human touch is the foundation of human relationships. Keltner was co-author of a study that looked at "celebratory touches" of pro basketball players. These include fist bumps, high-fives, chest bumps, leaping shoulder bumps, chest

punches, head slaps, head grabs, low fives, high tens, full hugs, half hugs, and team huddles. The researchers discovered that teams whose players touched one another a lot won more games than teams whose players didn't. Keltner concludes that touch lowers stress, builds morale, and produces triumphs

(www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2016/august/6081516.html; also see https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/hands_on_research).

This points to another casualty of COVID-19. Safety precautions we've taken the past year have cut us off from many forms of healthy touch. Feelings of loneliness, isolation, and stress have increased. Now imagine experiencing something like that for twelve years like the woman who was making her way to Jesus.

Jairus the synagogue leader had little trouble locating Jesus. Capernaum wasn't that big and, as usual, a large crowd had gathered around the Teacher. Jairus began working his way through the crowd. Desperate and determined, he finally got to Jesus. He fell to his knees and pleaded, "My little girl is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."

Jesus showed compassion and willingness to heal. He went with Jairus to go heal the young girl.

The woman suffering with chronic bleeding also found the crowd. Trying not to call attention to herself, she searched out Jesus in the crowd. Finally she saw him and began moving toward him. She wouldn't even try to speak to him. Almost superstitiously she thought, "If I can just touch his clothes, I'll be healed."

Inadequate as her faith was, she recognized that Jesus had healing power and she expected to be healed. So she came up behind him and touched his cloak. *Immediately* her bleeding stopped. She felt in her body that she was well, that she was free from her suffering. Do you know when the power of Jesus comes into your life?

Hoping to blend into the crowd, she stepped back and started away. But suddenly Jesus stopped in his tracks. He started looking around and asking, "Who touched my clothes?"

His disciples couldn't believe it. Everyone was touching Jesus. The crowd was pressing against him. How could he ask, "Who touched me?"

But Jesus kept looking around. He was sensitive enough to feel the difference between a touch of faith and the casual bumps of the jostling crowd.

Resisting the urge to run, the woman came forward and fell at Jesus' feet. She was trembling with fear. Could she keep the healing she had snatched? She didn't like being out in public—she'd been rejected and pushed aside for so long. Somehow, through her fearful trembling, she told Jesus what she had done and what had happened when she touched him.

He didn't belittle her or reject her or scold her. Instead, he said, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." I like how Eugene Peterson translates this: "Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, be blessed! Be healed of your plague" (*The Message*).

Seeing Jesus stop to find the woman and talk to her, we realize he's not content for us just to shoot up quick prayers to get a need met. Jesus wants us to know him and to be known by him. Imperfect faith can touch Jesus and receive from him. But he wants to commend our faith and help it grow. Jesus wants to give not just a quick touch of relief; he wants to give a lasting relationship.

When Jesus pointed out to the woman that it was her faith that healed her, he was showing her that there was nothing magical or mechanical about his healing power. She was healed because she dared to put *faith in Jesus and his power*. The power of Jesus healed her, but her faith was the channel that his power flowed through.

Remember, her medical problem made her religiously unclean and socially unacceptable. According to the Jewish ritual requirements, she was not to touch any holy thing. Yet she was delivered when she touched Jesus, the Holy Son of God. His holiness and power overcame her uncleanness and illness.

And Jesus dealt with her gently. "*Daughter, your faith has healed [or saved or rescued] you.*" Jesus met the need she came for, and he met her

deeper needs as well. “Go in peace”—that’s complete well-being. “Be freed from your suffering”—that’s physical healing.

Do you believe that your faith, your prayers can put you in touch with Jesus and his power to save and heal? Put yourself in that woman’s place and come to Jesus with your struggles, needs, and fears. Reach out to him and find that he’s already seeking you. He speaks gently to you. He meets your need and more. He affirms your faith—however feeble—and gives you peace.

In the book *Talking About God Is Dangerous*, Tatiana Goricheva tells about using the Lord’s Prayer as a meditation, a mantra, during her yoga exercises. One day, while reciting the Lord’s Prayer during her yoga, she had an encounter with God. That led to her conversion from atheism to Christianity. Almost without knowing it, she was reaching out to God who was seeking her. When she got in touch with God, he turned her life around (Billy Abraham, *Logic of Evangelism*, 210; James Sire, *Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All?* 192-98).

Chris Buskirk is the pastor of Abiding Harvest UMC in Tulsa. Earlier he served as an associate pastor at FUMC in Houston. One day in Houston a woman came to his office at the west campus of the church. She said she worked in a nearby office building and could see people coming and going at the church at almost all hours. They met in a warehouse type of building. She said she saw people hugging and greeting each other. The more she saw, the more interested she was. She asked Chris, “Why am I so drawn to this church?”

He told her that the Holy Spirit draws people to Jesus. She asked, “Holy Spirit? What are you talking about? What does Jesus have to do with this?” He said that through Jesus we can have a personal relationship with God. She said, “No way can someone have a personal relationship with God. I work with a hundred people who would come here if they could have a personal relationship with God.” She came from a Jewish background, her husband was Muslim, and they had a 13 year old boy.

Chris took a Bible and began to tell her, “In John 3...” She said, “John? 3? What does that mean?” He said he’d put post-it notes at some places for her to read and would give her the Bible. She and her son began attending

the church. The son came by the office every day to visit with Chris. One day, the woman said she wanted to become a Christian. She wanted to put her faith in Jesus and to join the church's fellowship. Her son also became a Christian and her husband started attending.

The Holy Spirit draws us to Jesus. When we take the risk of faith and reach out to him, we receive his power, we come to know him, and he gives us new life and peace.

Now, back to the story. The time Jesus spent talking with the woman must have included anxious moments for Jairus. There was no time to waste. They had to get home to his daughter before it was too late.

At the same time, the woman's healing may have encouraged Jairus. It demonstrated Jesus' power and confirmed for Jairus that he was doing the right thing.

But while Jesus was still talking with the woman, Jairus' heart fell as he saw some people from his house. They told him the devastating news, "Your daughter is dead." It was too late! Jairus sagged, almost collapsed. He barely heard his servants ask, "Why bother the teacher any more?" His hopes were dashed. His expectation had evaporated.

Jairus had thought that Jesus would heal his daughter. But he didn't have any idea that Jesus could raise her from the dead. I imagine he felt that he should go home and stop bothering Jesus.

But Jesus acted like the little girl's death hadn't changed the situation. He told Jairus, "Don't fear. Just believe. Trust me." No fear; just faith. Jairus had thought that Jesus' touch was what his daughter needed. But Jesus stressed *faith*, believing and trusting, as the key to her being restored.

Jesus took with him to Jairus' house only Peter, James, and John—three of his closest disciples. Perhaps he needed their faithful support. Or maybe this miracle was part of their special training. Or it could be Jesus just didn't want a crowd around for this miracle.

At any rate, they arrived with Jairus at his home where the mourners had already started weeping and wailing. Jesus said, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." In other words, "All is not lost. This dead child can be 'awakened' again to life."

It didn't take long for the wailing to become mockery. They laughed at Jesus. But he put them out of the house. Then he took Jairus and his wife and the three disciples to where the little girl was.

Jesus took her by the hand and said, "*Talitha koum!*" That's Aramaic. Mark translates it: "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" The commentaries say that this is a very gentle and familiar expression, like "Little lamb, get up."

Immediately the girl stood up and walked around. She was alive! Jesus restored her to life! This astonished her parents and the disciples.

Jesus told them not to tell anyone about this. Jesus' actions, like his words, are dangerous and subversive. If King Herod hears that someone with power over death is on the loose and at the head of a kingdom-of-God movement, he's going to be worried and there's going to be trouble. If the religious leaders in the Temple, or the self-appointed legal experts, find that someone is acting outside the official channels and claiming to be launching a kingdom-movement, they'll do their best to stifle it. Touching a dead body made a person ritually unclean. Even though Jesus' power gave life to the dead instead of him becoming unclean, many would still see Jesus as unclean.

N. T. Wright comments:

Only if we see Jesus' movement in all its dimensions, including the political one, will we understand that behind the intense and intimate human drama of each story there lies a larger, and darker, theme to which Mark is repeatedly drawing our attention. Jesus is on his way to confronting evil at its very heart. He will meet Death itself, which threatens God's whole beautiful creation, and defeat it in a way as unexpected as these two healings. This time, though, there will be no command to silence. (*Mark for Everyone*)

Jairus' hopes had died along with his little girl. Death is at work in the world. Death reaches out in many ways to pull people in. Jesus confronts and challenges death and all the ways it tries to draw its prey toward destruction.

"A Service of Committal" in *The United Methodist Book of Worship* that we use at gravesides opens this way (155):

In the midst of life, we are in death; from whom can we seek help?

Then it goes on to quote a psalm:

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth
(Psalm 124:8).

And then this word from Romans:

God who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. (Romans 8:11 NIV)

In our loss and grief we call on the One who gives life, who is the Life. We still feel the pain and emptiness of losing someone we love. I recently heard someone say, "Grief is the tax we pay on loving." But loss and grief are not the last words for people in Christ. As Paul says in another place, we don't grieve like those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Followers of Jesus grieve with hope. Jesus defeated death in his ministry even though the people he healed and raised from the dead had to die again some day. But Jesus decisively defeated death through his own dying and resurrection. Through faith in him we share in his victory. Our dying brings us into God's presence in a fuller way. And when Jesus returns and appears in all his glory, he'll give us a resurrection like his. Then we'll live in the new heaven and new earth God will make.

In the meantime, we grieve and mourn our losses, even though we know they're not forever. We help each other experience grief in a healthy and redemptive way. We're joined together and we touch each other in some way to communicate God's mercy and compassion. And by God's grace we prepare for a "radiant death" (Dallas Willard, cited in *Renovaré* webinar on grief, 3/9/21).

Let's allow the power of Jesus' resurrection to open up God's future in our lives. Don't fear; just believe. Reach out to Jesus in faith. You'll find he's there, giving new life and hope, grace and freedom, peace and wholeness.