

Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

Mark 5:21-43

Year B, Season of Pentecost
Sunday Between June 26 and July 2
4th Sunday After Pentecost 2009

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click [here](#) for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

This text is a "Mark sandwich," a story-within-a-story, that is meant to be digested as a whole.

Jesus has just returned from foreign territory on the other side of Lake Galilee, and once again a large crowd gathers - the gossip network is successfully spreading news of Jesus; successfully increasing his public status and honour; and thereby also increasing his potential threat to the established authorities.

Indeed, his reputation has increased to the point that two members of the elite take the risk of crossing strict social boundaries to seek Jesus' aid: Jairus, an official of the synagogue, and an unnamed woman who had spent all her money being treated by many doctors - to no avail. We know that Jairus belongs to the elite by virtue of his office. We infer the unnamed woman is also among the elite by virtue of her having money to spend on doctors. She is also probably a widow, since otherwise the money would not be hers to spend. We can also assume that Jairus has also had doctors treat his daughter - also to no avail.

Thus, in a nut shell, the context of this lesson is two elite members, who have used their socially accepted resources to no avail, step out of their gated communities and join the crowd of low-class people on the street to seek help from the rising folk hero - Jesus of Nazareth. A daring come down for them.

The lesson begins with Jairus approaching Jesus in public. Throwing himself at Jesus' feet is an action that Jairus would only do for a person Jairus acknowledged as being greatly superior to him. The crowd, of course, would be taking all this in and adding it to the stories that were spreading about Jesus.

The story of Jairus' unnamed daughter is then interrupted by the story of an unnamed woman.

Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

An elite woman out by herself in a crowd such as this has placed herself in a position to be permanently ostracized by her own family network. A dangerous, life-threatening gamble on her part. Her audacity is highlighted further by Mark revealing that she came to the crowd with the thought that **SHE** would **TOUCH** Jesus' clothing. Gasp! Shocking! It is bad enough that she would be in the crowd. But that she would also go with the intention of touching a man's clothing is completely outrageous. At a minimum, the most she should do is what Jairus did, abase herself at Jesus' feet and beg for his aid.

Again, Mark highlights the extraordinariness of her touching Jesus with the comments and questions in verses 30 to 32. Unlike everyone else in the crowd who had bumped into Jesus, the unnamed woman had deliberately touched Jesus; she had faithfully, hopefully, touched Jesus. Notice that she is healed at once, and she knows it. All without Jesus having said or done anything.

However, Jesus does feel power going out of him; is also aware of a change in his body. He knows he has been touched for healing and not just accidentally.

Now the woman comes before Jesus, humbling herself as Jairus had done, acknowledging Jesus' superior status. But Jesus, immediately calls her, "My daughter," placing her within his kinship, and since kinship was the paramount definition of one's social standing, these two words quite literally redefine this woman's place in the community.

Once again, it is important to remember that in the Bible, "faith" is **NOT** about "beliefs," or "ideas," or "understandings." It is about relationships. And so Jesus' observation:

My daughter, your faith has made you well.

is better understood as:

My daughter, your trust / loyalty / bonding has made you well.

As if to emphasize this for us, Mark immediately has messengers from Jairus' house say the exact opposite of what Jesus has just said:

Your daughter has died, don't bother trusting that Jesus' can make her well.

However, Jesus overhears and ignores the messengers and encourages Jairus:

Don't be afraid. Instead, trust.

(Which ought to remind us of [last week's lesson](#) - Jesus' words to his followers in the midst of the storm.)

Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

The rest of the story basically shows us how an honourable Holy Man would act: With authority and directness; excluding curious / skeptical by-standers; including disciples (for their mentoring) and parents (for their position as parents and for their confirmation as witnesses).

Jesus' command that the little girl be given something to eat is to confirm that she indeed fully alive as before and is not a ghost or zombie. Eating would also restore her into the family's circle and routines. (Healing disease is always a two-step process: The correction of the physical symptoms, followed by acceptance and restoration into one's normal social context.)

Again, this story ends as did [last week's](#) with everyone completely amazed. And again, it is important not to get side-tracked by the "miraculous" healing and restoring to life - though they are both pretty amazing.

But the real story here is about the quality of relationship with Jesus. Jesus does **NOT** want us to be amazed. He wants us to trust God. To trust without hesitations or reservations. To trust without fear. Now **THAT** would be amazing.

David Ewart,
www.davidewart.ca

Permission is granted for non-profit use of these materials.

Acknowledgement in oral presentations is not required.

Otherwise, please acknowledge source as, "David Ewart, www.holytextures.com."