

THE PRIVILEGED AND THE DISADVANTAGED

Mark 5:21-43

Mark's Gospel reads at a fast pace, its hurriedness speaks to our rushed 21st century day. In our readings today, we are introduced to two very different persons looking for Jesus' healing touch in their lives.

As the story unfolds, it's helpful to imagine that we are observing Jesus among the the frantic push of the crowd. Imagine moving among a few hundred people while trying to glimpse the prophet and healer named Jesus.

Jairus is the leader of the synagogue where Jesus and the disciples have entered. Jairus is person of influence, privilege and means. He's also an anxious father hoping against hope that the healer, Jesus, can save his very sick young daughter from death.

Jairus falls down at the feet of Jesus in absolute desperation. If I'm in the crowd that day, I am deeply moved by Jairus' sense of urgency and by his earnest love for his daughter, for I am a parent too, and I can only imagine the gripping anxiousness and paralyzing sadness of Jairus. It's been wisely said, that a parent's child is their heart outside of their body.

As Jesus is making his way to Jairus' little daughter, with the very large crowd following and bumping up against one another, an unnamed woman, who had chronic hemorrhaging and who had been to doctor after doctor without remedy, who was likely deemed and isolated as "impure" or "unclean" by the social customs of that time, brushed up behind Jesus reasoning that she believed that she would be healed if only she could "touch" his cloak.

She managed to touch Jesus' cloak from behind; power surges from Jesus to her, and she is healed, but there's a lot of hanging suspense at this point-- Will Jesus rebuke her, an unnamed woman isolated as "unclean" by society, or will he have compassion on her? Will Jesus treat the unnamed sick woman in dire need in the same way as he was being compassionately attentive to the privileged and respected Jairus?

What strikes me with both healings, is that Jesus equally affirms the humanity and dignity of both Jairus and the unnamed woman. Jesus sees past the social constructs of class and "purity", and sees the great human suffering and need in both the privileged Jairus and in the disadvantaged (disenfranchised and marginalized) unnamed woman.

We live in a time where society still puts labels on people, and clumps them into categories of favored and inferior, legal and illegal, citizen and criminal, all without adequately and compassionately affirming the humanity of people-- especially the most vulnerable among us.

The theme of "touch" is reiterated throughout Mark's Gospel. The unnamed woman "touched" Jesus' cloak, Jesus will take Jairus deceased daughter by the hand, and in a the first chapter of Mark there is also the account of Jesus healing a leper (one with a scaly skin disease) with the "touch" of his hand. "Touch" was as much of a way to transfer power (possibly) as it was a way of affirming the humanity of the one being touched in an inclusive and reconciliatory way. Jesus' healing of others often resulted in their reinstatement into community-- they were no longer pushed off to the shadows of society.

The term used as Jesus heals those in need throughout Mark's gospel is the Greek term for "save". So often, salvation is framed as some kind of metaphysical transformation. Jesus demonstrates the term "save" in physical and tangible ways of healing and mending. Jesus' saving act of healing reconnects the marginalized back to their community.

Subtly, Jesus names the unnamed woman, “daughter”. She is a part of the family. She belongs. She is loved by God. She is acknowledged, and more importantly, affirmed by Jesus.

Jesus tells the unnamed woman, now renamed “daughter”, to “go in peace”. Remember, how Jesus had transformed the chaos of the storm into tranquility in chapter 4? “Peace” for Jesus is an intention of calmness and an experience of wholeness as much as it is harmony and the absence of violence.

Jesus does heal (save) the little daughter of Jairus. He calls her back to life from death; Jesus takes the daughter who had been separated from parents by death and reunites them all.

While we would love to have the “saving” power of Jesus’ “touch”, we can nevertheless increase in our faith when what we learn and practice the ways of Jesus’ compassionate attention and affirmation of those suffering and on the outskirts of society.