

Mark 5: 21-43 Known

Our gospel passage today actually contains two stories about Jesus and his healing ministry. This format is often called a sandwich because the stories are not sequential but one story begins and is then interrupted by the second one before the action of the first story is completed. Many commentaries view this as a literary device used by Mark to emphasize a point. Since this feature occurs often in Mark with stories having a common thread, that is probably valid. Yet I think many times in the normal course of life we find that one activity or happening in our lives is interrupted by another. The events in our lives are often jumbled together. Some new happening occurring before we have dealt with the first. How one event might affect another is also important. So although I think we should consider how the two descriptions of healing by Jesus have points in common, we should also pay attention to the differences and to the manner in which Jesus dealt with both people who approached him—almost at the same time. Our passage's focus is around the interactions of Jairus, an unnamed woman, and finally Jairus' daughter with Jesus. As this passage begins, Jesus has just returned from his trip to the "other" or Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee. That was a geographical border crossing—going where Jewish tradition was not followed. He hasn't been back long or even gotten very far from the shore and already a great crowd has again gathered around him. Into this crowd comes Jairus who is identified and named as he approaches Jesus. Jairus is not only Jewish, but a leader in the synagogue which identifies him as someone of importance. Being an official of the synagogue he is a person of standing and authority in Jewish society, although not a priest. This approach of a prominent figure in Jewish society to an itinerant rabbi was a sign of the spreading of Jesus' fame despite the constant injunction voiced in Mark that his deeds should be kept secret. The fact that Jairus came to Jesus indicates that he recognized that Jesus had authority that he himself did not have. It shows that not everyone in Jewish leadership positions rejected Jesus. But Jairus did not come to Jesus as the one in authority. The text tells us that not only did Jairus come himself instead of sending a servant, but that when he came and saw Jesus he fell at his feet and repeatedly begged Jesus to come to the aid of his daughter who lay near death. "Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." Implicit in this request is a confession of faith in Jesus' authority over life and death; a recognition of Jesus' identity. Those in the boat with Jesus have already raised the identity question, "Who then is this that even the wind and sea obey him." Jairus comes asking that Jesus demonstrate directly his power over life itself by saving his young daughter. And in typical Markan fashion, Jesus' response is immediate. Jesus speaks no words but we are given a very brief statement of his reaction: "So he went with him." Jesus started off with Jairus on a mission to heal the daughter accompanied by this large crowd which continued to according to the text "press in on him." As Jesus begins to move toward Jairus' home, the text inserts the second story; the story of the unnamed woman who in the crowd who approaches and touches Jesus. It has always been something of a point of interest to me that in the midst of this crowd pressing in upon him, there was such a difference in the touch of this woman that Jesus could identify it among all the others. If you think about the way a crowd presses in upon celebrities as a model of comparison, most of those in the crowd want to touch them. I imagine many in this crowd around Jesus had the same desire—to be close to this famous man who did such amazing things. Many were probably there out of curiosity but not this woman. She was in the

crowd out of a need just as desperately felt as Jairus'. She had something else in common with Jairus. She too had a need for healing by Jesus. The text explains to us that she had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. Not only that, but medical treatment had not helped but worsened her condition and taken all of her money. There are many points of contrast here. She was a woman and so should not have been seeking any type of contact with a man not of her family. Of course, as many have noted, because of her condition she would have been seen as "unclean" by her family and society in general. According to Jewish law she should not have been among the crowd as touching her would have made them unclean. The contrast is made clear because Jairus is given a name at the beginning of the text, but this woman is simply introduced into the story as "a woman suffering from hemorrhages". It is her condition which identifies her, not her status. Her need for healing and her hope that this man whose healing touch she has heard of can indeed make her well, "if she but touches his clothes" impels her to approach secretly in defiance of custom. She reaches her goal, touches Jesus' clothes and immediately feels the blood flowing from her stop. Again we find the immediacy present in Mark's gospel. Not only did she receive immediate healing, but Jesus immediately knew that someone had touched him in need and drew power from him. The trip to Jairus' daughter halts as Jesus asks "Who touched my clothes?" The disciples view the issue much as I mentioned—in a crowd like this, they respond, how can you ask a question like that. The disciples were unaware that anything had happened. But Jesus recognizes that someone has drawn on his power. Just as the woman knew that there were changes in her body, Jesus knew that his body had changed as power had gone out from him. The power had gone, not because he had touched someone, but because someone had touched him—and Jesus was unwilling to allow the outflow of his power to happen without his acknowledgement. Jesus looks around and the woman came forward in "fear and trembling" and like Jairus fell down before Jesus, confessing the whole truth. We are not given her words to Jesus, but it seems she would have recounted the story of her illness and her desperate need for healing as well as her belief that touching Jesus could accomplish that. She probably did not have to come forward. She had accomplished her goal and was now well, but she knew what Jesus was asking. In coming forward and telling her truth, probably made many in the crowd uneasy wondering if they had come in contact with her. Telling Jesus the truth, invited public embarrassment and shame, yet she came forward. Instead of the public shame she might have expected, she was given a name by Jesus: "daughter". She was not only healed of her physical complaint by touching Jesus' clothes but also brought into the family—claimed as kin by Jesus. Jesus confirms her healing, "Daughter, your faith has made you well." She receives a benediction from Jesus—Shalom—go in peace. Resume your place in your family and community restored to life and health. Jesus has crossed another boundary in his compassionate interaction with this woman—seeing her not as someone unclean and rejected but as "daughter". He has not labeled her, but has seen her as an individual and drawn her into relationship. But now the interrupted trip to Jairus' daughter becomes the subject of the passage. The pace of Mark's gospel never slows. In verse 35 we are told while Jesus was still talking to this "daughter" news was brought to Jairus about his daughter. He is told devastating news—it is too late to bring the healer, she has died and is beyond help or hope. Overhearing this message, Jesus again utters words we often find in scripture: "Do not fear." Jesus urges Jairus to continue to have faith as he sets out again to see Jairus' daughter. Unlike before, Jesus does not allow the crowd

to remain, but selects only three of the disciples to go with him—Peter, James and John. These three are often chosen to accompany Jesus to witness things when the others are left behind. In this comment we have the juxtaposition of two important things—fear and faith. Have faith, do not fear. In our lives the problem is often that fear enters and consumes us while the prospect and promise of faith seems to remain distant. In our text, both of these words are in the present tense—giving them a relationship. In this story, they call attention to Jesus’ transforming power to change our lives from fear to trust, a transformation in which the prospect of life and salvation appears in a wholly new dimension. We anticipate that in this story Jesus will go to Jairus’ daughter and heal her. In Jesus’ words we see the promise of restored life. We already know the outcome. Indeed, the details of this healing follow. Jesus arrives to find a house full of weeping and mourning people whom he tells not to weep because the child is only sleeping. Their response is to laugh at Jesus. After sending all but his three companions and the parents out of the house, Jesus takes the girl by the hand and tells her to get up. And immediately, she gets up and walks around to the amazement of those present. As we have noted about Mark’s gospel, some things are constantly present. As with all the healings which Jesus does among the Jewish community, those present are urged to secrecy about what has happened. In this passage there are several places where Jesus acts across boundaries—ethnic and gender. There are underlying issues related to the concept of ritual cleanliness—yet sometimes too much is made of that. Jesus does not send either daughter to a priest to restore their cleanliness and acceptance into the community. He has done all that needs to be done. Perhaps that is the most important message within this passage. Jesus’ life along with his death grants life-changing healing. His is a healing authority that does indeed cross all boundaries and recognizes no labels. Jesus chooses not to leave people in the condition in which he finds them. And he has the power to alter that condition. What does this realization mean for us as Christians? Must we not also cross boundaries—whether they are related to ethnicity, gender, race, politics or whatever on that list of labels we use to separate ourselves from others. Are we not called to follow in Christ’s footsteps and see each person as a child of God who is beloved? May God grant us the courage to do this. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.