Mark 5:21-43

21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat\* to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake.22Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet23and begged him repeatedly, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.’24So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.25Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.26She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.27She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,28for she said, ‘If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.’29Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.30Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’31And his disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, “Who touched me?” ’32He looked all round to see who had done it.33But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.34He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’

35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?’36But overhearing\* what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’37He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.38When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.39When he had entered, he said to them, ‘Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.’40And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was.41He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha cum’, which means, ‘Little girl, get up!’42And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.43He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Everyone Matters to Jesus

In today’s gospel reading we come across two people who are at the ends of their ropes; Jairus and the woman in the crowd. Anyone who has ever had a child who has been seriously sick or injured, who has had a close brush with death, can certainly identify with Jairus. Anyone who has suffered or *is suffering* from some ailment or illness, something that the doctors have not been able to cure, someone who’s reached the lifetime limit on their health insurance benefits for an illness, who is nearly destitute because of the cost of treatment can identify with the woman in the crowd. I would guess that some of you can easily identify with both of these persons. But there is an interplay between these two people provides us with a lesson beyond the obvious miracle, a lesson about God’s love for all people, and about how important it is for us to realize this infinite love.

Jesus had left the crowd to go on a quick mission to the Gerasene region across the Sea of Galilee where he healed a demoniac and then was politely asked to leave. He returns to a crowd, and Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, comes to Jesus, gets on his knees and begs Jesus to heal his dying daughter. Now Jairus was a leader at the synagogue, which meant that he was pretty high up in the community, not a man accustomed to beg or plead or fall at anyone’s feet. And being from the synagogue it was particularly incredible that he falls before *Jesus’* feet; as a leader in the synagogue, Jairus represented the traditional religious customs and practices while Jesus represented something radically different. Jesus and the synagogue were often at odds with each other, so for Jairus to fall before Jesus’ feet was not simply an admission that he had no one else to turn to in order to save his own daughter; it was also an admission that the traditional ways of his religion were not effective. Jairus has lost faith in the old way, and now, in utter despair, comes to Jesus as a last resort.

It always impresses me how Jesus, when he’s with the crowd, will stop whatever he’s doing in order to respond to an individual plea from anyone. He doesn’t ask about their religion or background or nationality; he attends to the needs of the Roman and the Samaritan, and the Pharisee and the tax collector. Jesus immediately makes his way to Jairus’ home with the disciples and the crowd in tow. But along the way something happened that likely frustrated Jairus. There is a woman, a poor, sick woman whose name we don’t even know, whose life has been devastated by her illness – she has been hemorrhaging for twelve years, and in hear search for a cure she had exhausted all her benefits to no avail; her illness had only gotten worse. She, like Jairus was in utter despair and, like Jairus, thought that Jesus was her only hope. But unlike Jairus, she felt that she could not even approach Jesus with a request for help. Jairus, after all, was a big wig, a leader in the synagogue, belonged to the chamber of commerce, was in the Rotary Club, was a man of status. He could approach Jesus publicly and ask for help. But a poor woman? A poor unclean woman? How could she approach a rabbi? She couldn’t even speak to him in public much less expect him to help her. She didn’t know that Jesus had just taken a trip across a stormy sea to free one demon-possessed boy in gentile territory. She certainly did not merit Jesus’ attention. But if she could just touch his cloak. That’s all it would take from such a holy man. And he wouldn’t even notice. It wouldn’t inconvenience him in the least – just touch his cloak and disappear.

So when Jesus stops in his tracks, turns around and asks the crowd, “Who touched my clothes?” Jairus must have not only been a bit irritated – remember, his twelve-year-old daughter is on her death bed. He must have wondered if Jesus was a bit cuckoo. The disciples must have shared a secret smirk with one another as Jesus asks this ridiculous question. “Uh, Master. Do you see all these people pressing in around you? Which one do you think touched you?” Try that at Times Square on New Year’s Eve; just blurt out, “Who touched my clothes?” and see what reaction you get.

And unfortunately for Jairus, this ridiculous question does not go unanswered. This contaminated woman steps up and confesses. And you see the sad irony here; she knows that she has been cured – she felt her bleeding immediately stop – yet she has been detected and now trembles with fear because now she may not even live long enough to benefit from this miracle. Her life was given to her, but she fears it will be taken away just as quickly because she has violated the religious laws, those laws that Jairus, as a leader in the synagogue, would have embraced and enforced. Now she stands in front of both men, ready to face the consequences for her breech of the law – death by stoning. And had circumstances been different, had Jairus’ daughter not been in such critical condition, and had Jairus not been in such a hurry to get home, and had he not humbly put himself at Jesus’ mercy, he might have condemned this poor woman who goes unnamed in this story – unnamed. Usually we remember the names of people who are important to us and care nothing about the names of others – a poor sick woman may have meant nothing to Jairus, particularly at this moment of desperation, and her act of touching Jesus, which caused him to stop, which caused her to tell her life story, which delayed Jesus from getting to his daughter might have so angered Jairus that he would pronounce an immediate death sentence upon this woman.

But Jesus takes a completely opposite tack and says, “Daughter (DAUGHTER! – NOT JUST A WOMAN BUT A PART OF HIS FAMILY), your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed.” *We’re not here to throw stones at you. In fact, I commend you for your faith; you believed that simply touching my cloak would end your illness, and so it was! Go in peace! Be joyful! Be healed!*

Jairus does not have enough time to consider the radical course of action taken by this renegade rabbi. His jaw only starts to drop when he gets the most devastating news of his life: Your daughter has died. There’s no point in this Jesus coming to your house. Suddenly this whole incident with the unclean woman has fled from his thoughts and all he can feel is the emptiness. All his prayers, all his pleading, all his attempts to help his daughter live a full life have been of no avail. I have seen people literally drop to their knees when such news is delivered. It’s as if all their energy has abandoned them and they can’t speak or stand up. They are completely paralyzed in grief.

And at this moment of apparent hopelessness, Jesus says to Jairus, “Do not fear; only believe.” What is the origin of fear? Isn’t it the belief that you have been abandoned? Forsaken by God? Left without hope? Jairus could easily fall into the abyss, believing that death is irreversible, that there is no hope. But here stands Jesus, not consoling him, not saying, “I’m sorry” or “I feel your pain.” Jesus is opening a door that Jairus desperately wants to walk through, but reason and experience are holding him back. *How can I believe that anything can be done for my daughter at this time? She’s dead. It’s over.* But oh how he wants to believe in miracles.

And now his mind flashes back to that poor woman , someone who he might not have cared about except that she became an obstacle to his daughter’s healing. But Jesus did not see her as an obstacle; he afforded her the same attention, no *more* attention than he had afforded Jairus’ daughter, the daughter of a dignitary. And though this woman had not asked Jesus for any attention, Jesus had stopped to listen to her, to *give* attention to her, more attention than I cared to give her.

And now maybe the lightbulbs started to shine in Jairus’ head. *God is a God for the clean as well as the unclean, for the dignitary as well as the nobody. For the Jew and the Gentile. And God has shown his impartiality through this Jesus. His power and his love are manifest in him. Yes, I do believe that all things are possible through God, and God is surely active in Jesus.*

There is nobody for whom Jesus would not cross a stormy sea to free from bondage, nobody for whom he would not drop everything that he’s doing just to heal, and no one who comes to him in faith is denied. St Augustine recognized that God loves each individual equally and completely; God loves you neither more nor less than anyone else, because no one is more or less important than anyone else. The poor, unnamed hemorrhaging woman and the foreign boy who is chained among the tombs are just as important to Jesus as Jairus’ daughter. At the same time, our infinitely patient Lord teaches us to love others the way he loves us. Let us be thankful that he doesn’t just indulge us.