

Healing of the Daughter of Jairus and the Woman with a Hemorrhage

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It is a soft, summer morning in Capernaum and Jesus is in the height of his ministry. Large crowds follow him wherever he goes, crowds hungry with hope; crowds fired by his counter-cultural words and miraculous deeds. This morning, Jesus prepares to speak to them, to translate into language they can comprehend the Eternal Life that lives in his heart. His back is to the gentle, sunlit sea. The hubbub softens to a murmur, finally stilled by the lapping waves.

But before Jesus can begin, a distressed man bursts through the gathered crowd. His robes fly about him as he runs to Jesus and falls at his feet. This man is important, so important that we all have known his name for two thousand years. This is Jairus who lives nearby and organizes the worship in the synagogue. Now breathless and swallowing sobs, Jairus pleads with Jesus: Please! My daughter! You can give her life!

Every loving father has been Jairus at least once in his life. We know these fathers. We are these fathers. They are the ones who burst into emergency rooms with a seizing infant in their arms. They are the ones who stare blankly at the pronouncement of a stillborn child. They are the old men in war-ravaged countries who kneel at the sides of their fallen sons and desecrated daughters. They are all the men throughout history rendered helpless by the forces of unbridled power, greed and death.

The merciful heart of Jesus understands this man and his desperate urgency. Without even a word, Jesus gets up and accompanies Jairus to the place of his pleading.

But there is another urgency pushing forward from the crowds: a woman, apparently of low importance for we have never known her name. She is a woman whom the ages have defined by her affliction. She is “The Woman with the Hemorrhage”. Without the status of Jairus, she approaches Jesus as such a woman must. She crawls behind him at his heels, reaching through the milling masses to even scrape the hem of his garment.

This is a troubled woman, a stigmatized woman. Her life has been spent, literally, in embarrassment, isolation, fatigue and, no doubt, abuse. For twelve years – coincidentally the life span of Jairus’ s daughter – her vitality has bled out of her. Her face is gaunt; her

eyes sunken. Her soul's light is all but extinguished. She is a woman who knows a particular kind of scorn.

We know these women. We are these women. They are the ones filled with remorse for an aborted baby. They are the ones who miscarry their longed-for child. They are the women whose beautiful young sons are profiled, stereotyped and hunted on the violent streets. They are the mothers of "The Disappeared". They are the women who suffer disproportionately from war, poverty, hunger and violence. They are trafficked women, prostituted women, women victimized by the long saga of domination.

It is just such a broken woman who stretches her fingers through the Galilean dust in a last reckless reach for healing. She finds only the hem of his robe. Touching it, she is transformed, like a parched meadow in the spring rain. Her whole being reaches up to receive the holy restoration. She knows herself to be healed. And it is enough; it is everything. She retreats into the resignation of her otherwise lonely life.

But Jesus wants more for us than just the practical miracles we beg for. We ask for one healing; Jesus wants our eternal salvation. We ask for one blessing; Jesus wants our entire lives to be filled with grace. We ask for one prayer to be answered; Jesus wants our life to become a prayer.

Jesus feels the electrical touch of her hope. He feels the secret healing she has extracted from him. He turns to seek her. Can you see their eyes meet? Yes, the bleeding has been stemmed, but he sees the deeper wounds that scar her soul. His look of immense mercy invites her to tell him "the whole truth". By her touch, she has commandeered a physical healing. But by his gracious turning toward her, her entire being is renewed. In this sacred glance, her history has been healed. Her future has been pulled from darkness into light. Her capacity to love has been rekindled. She now and forever will remember herself as a child of God.

Jairus waits, no doubt impatiently, at the edge of this miracle, anxious for such power to touch his daughter's life. He fears they have lingered too long with the woman. His servants arrive, confirming his fears. He receives the dreaded report, "Your daughter has died."

Jesus now pushes Jairus to the gauntlet of pure faith. In the face of this devastating news, Jesus tells him, "Do not be afraid; just have faith." Is this not an almost impossible command? Like Jairus, we all know what it is to worry for our children:

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- Fathers of color teach their sons behaviors to protect them from profiling.
- Immigrant parents fear their children will be ripped from them in a pre-dawn raid.
- Famine-ravaged mothers watch their children disappear into hunger.
- In hospitals and doctor's offices, devastated parents summon the courage to accompany their critically ill child.

And Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. Have faith.!" What can he possibly mean?

Perhaps it is this simple. In Jairus's home, Jesus takes the dead girl's hand. He says, "Talitha, koum – Little girl, arise." His call to her heart tells her there is no darkness, devastation or death from which God cannot draw us into life. This is the truth Jesus brings to the little girl and to us. But it is a truth that, in our fear and need, we cannot always see.

For the moment, this girl lives. But at some time in history she, like all of us, will die. So the miracle is not the restoration of her life. The miracle is that her eyes, and her parents' eyes, are opened to the power of God over death. Despite all appearances, God's life endures eternally.

Like Jairus, caregivers stand daily at the edge of such miracles. Jodie is a hospice nurse. During the few months of George's final illness, she worked tirelessly – and with ultimate success – to restore his relationship with an alienated son. At George's funeral, a friend asked the son how he could be so peaceful with his father's death, given the troubles of their relationship. The son answered with a phrase that confirmed Jodie's faith, "...because my father died healed and that has healed me."

This is the revelation of this Gospel passage. If we live by faith, we live beyond cure into healing. If we live by faith, even death can bring life. If we live by faith, we are free to release all worry into the abundant mercy of God who grants us healing even beyond our asking or desire.

Man or woman, old or young, at some time in our lives each one of us has been Jairus. Each one of us has been one or the other of these two women. Within their stories of woundedness and deep faith, our stories shelter. Jairus and the afflicted women – unnamed like so many women throughout time – believed there was a way to new life. They reached for it. They begged for it. What is it in us that cries out for such healing? What is it in us that, without the touch of Jesus, teeters on the verge of death?

Simply by believing, these three Gospel figures became new beings. Simply by believing, their orientation changed from darkness to light. By their example, let us lift up those wounded and deadened places in our hearts and world before the loving gaze of Jesus.

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To what suffering in our souls is God whispering the encouragement, “Talitha, kum”? What is the “whole truth” Jesus is inviting us to confide? Let us arise and respond to him in the full energy of our faith. Let us gaze with boundless confidence into the eyes of God’s mercy.