

Proper 8, Year B  
Sunday, June 28, 2009  
Mark 5: 21-43

*“But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’”*

Today’s Gospel is a rich and powerful account of God’s ability to create hope in a hopeless situation. Actually, what we get in this Gospel are two powerful stories of healing rolled into one.

In Mark’s Gospel, perhaps more so than in the others, characters quickly appear on the scene and disappear just as quickly. Take today’s examples. Jairus, a synagogue leader, emerges from the crowd and implores Jesus to save his dying daughter. As Jesus is on his way to her home, pushing his way through the crowd, a woman suffering from a terrible ailment, convinced of Jesus’ ability to heal her, pushes her way to Jesus and reaches to touch him.

We are given very little background in either situation; we know only that Jairus’ young daughter is dying before she has had the chance to mature into a woman and bear her own children, a great tragedy to be sure.

In the case of the woman suffering from bleeding, we are told that her disease has afflicted her for twelve years, that much money and many physicians have not been able to cure her, and that she was desperate for healing. She is so desperate, in fact, that she will cast aside all the religious laws of her day which tell her that she, being unclean, should not come in contact with those who are clean.

Jesus, for his part, is certainly supposed to avoid touching her. He is also supposed to avoid the dead, as they are also a source of contamination according to the religious laws of the dead. So from the get go, this is a story about transgression. In that light, we told only enough about these characters to know their absolute boldness in approaching Jesus.

More to the point, however, we are told even less about what happens to them *after* their incredible, healing encounters with Jesus. We do not get to see the hemorrhaging woman restored to her community, live a full and normal life, perhaps get married and have children. Now that she is healed of her affliction, she is certainly free to do all of these things.

Likewise, we do not know the future of the dead girl who is called back to life by Jesus. She is told to get up and walk, and immediately, Mark takes us away to the next episode, leaving us to our astonishment.

We want to assume, of course, that she is also free to lead the full life which death has threatened to rob from her, and which Jesus has restored to her.

In fact, that Saint Mark wants us to assume just that; full and joy filled futures for these newly healed women.

You see, I believe that Mark invites us to see ourselves in the person of the bleeding woman and the dead girl. I believe that Mark wants us to look at them and to see ourselves as threatened with sickness, mortality, exclusion, and life cut short. Mark wants us to believe that these two women have been restored to fullness of life and joy because he wants *us* to imagine that *we too* will also be restored to such fullness of life.

He wants us to imagine the liberated, full, joyful futures which Jesus has given back to these women, because he wants us to imagine the full, joyful futures which Jesus gives to us.

Why? Because the kind of healing which Jesus offers to these two women, and to us, is not just immediate healing from our afflictions. Jesus offers much more. Jesus offers the kind of healing that brings with it fullness of life and days lived in knowledge of his peace. God does not just want us to be free of whatever afflictions we bear; God wants us to fruitfully and with his hope for the rest of our days and beyond.

Where illness and death have threatened to rob these two women of their future, Jesus restores to them a future filled with God's possibilities and God's presence.

That is why Jesus says to the bleeding woman, "Go in peace, and be healed of your disease." He desires that she be healed and made well not just in the moment, but that she experience peace and healing for the rest of her days.

That is why Jesus tells the little girl to rise and walk, and orders her something to eat; he desires that she live fully, joyfully, that she grows into the creature God intends her to be and experiences abundant life.

In fact, some form of the phrase "be made well" is uttered on many occasions in Mark's Gospel, and on three occasions in this passage alone. Jairus implores Jesus to come with him so that his little daughter might be *made well*. The bleeding woman, certain that Jesus is a healer and holy man, utters the words, "if I but touch his garment, I will be *made well*." And upon seeing the faith of that same woman, Jesus blesses her with the knowledge that her faith has *made her well*.

All three of these references to being made well are from the Greek word *sozo*, a rich word which means both salvation and healing. It is a word which refers not only to the present, but to the future as well. Salvation and healing are not just about our todays, but also about our tomorrows.

You see, my friends, there is an intimate and powerful connection between being saved and being healed. This is because the kind of healing that Jesus gives to us does far more than liberate us from our physical and spiritual afflictions. It is the kind of saving health which remains with us for all of our days and continues in us even as we stand in God's Kingdom in that great future.

Imagine, brothers and sisters, that kind of incredible healing. Do you, like Jairus, believe that Jesus can bring you back from the brink of death? Do you, like the faithful woman, believe that the touch of Jesus can restore you to health and joy and peace?

Where in your life do you desperately need or seek the kind of salvation and healing that Jesus offers? Where do you, in your deepest being, desire not just that Jesus will heal you in body, mind and Spirit, but that Jesus will restore you to full, joyful life the rest of your days and beyond?

It takes great faith indeed to believe in this kind of healing. But this is precisely the incredible gift which is offered to us by God in Christ, and which Mark seeks to convey in his Gospel story.

I believe that if we want to respond to this invitation, to see ourselves in the place of the dying girl and the hemorrhaging woman, then we are asked to believe in the kind of saving health that binds us, blesses us, and sends us on our way in peace to be the people God intends us to be.

Another way to say it is to proclaim that there is no hopelessness which can drown out the hope of Jesus Christ. There is no impossibility from which God cannot draw infinite possibilities. And there is no limit to God's desire that we live fully, abundantly, joyfully, and in the light of his extraordinary peace.

"Do not fear, only believe," Jesus tells us. As you come to this altar today, to receive the sacrament of God's saving health in Christ Jesus, remember that God desires deeply to heal you where you hurt the most, to bring back to life what seems most close to death in you, and to restore you to an abundant and full life beyond your wildest imagination. God desires that you leave this place in peace, that you experience his healing, and that you walk in hope now and always.

Amen.