

More Than We Could Ask Or Imagine

Mark 5:21-43
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First Presbyterian Church
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The Band-Aid was invented at the turn of the 20th Century, in the year 1901. One of its major uses, however, is not to cover cuts and scrapes, but rather, to heal emotions. Children get Band-Aids after vaccinations because it makes the shot hurt less emotionally.

As pediatrician Dr. Paula Prezioso of New York University Medical Center says, "I'm constantly amazed after giving an injection, when I put the Band-Aid on, the crying stops."¹ Band-Aids provide emotional healing and comfort.

In today's New Testament lesson, Jesus encounters two people – a man and a woman – each in need of different kinds of healing and comfort. Both are in the grips of inconsolable pain – the impending death of a beloved child for the man, and 12 years of bleeding and social isolation for the woman.

In desperation, they each look to Jesus as their last hope. As Mark says, the man comes to Jesus, falls at his feet and begs him, saying, "Come and lay your hands on (my daughter), so that she may be made well and live."

Similarly, the woman comes up behind Jesus, saying to herself, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

What is it to be made well? Think about what's troubling you right now? Maybe it's a physical limitation or ailment, a sense of isolation from family or friends or maybe you're gripped by worry and fear when it comes to the world these days.

Whenever we are faced with hopeless, drawn out, lingering troubles, a sense of fear and doubt and grief and isolation can set in. And this makes whatever we're going through even worse. What's a person to do?

The man, who was a Pharisee by the way – a skeptic and even enemy of Jesus – the man sets aside his need to be right, his inability to believe in anything he doesn't fully understand and control, and he goes to Jesus, falling down at his feet.

Notice, however, that he didn't surrender himself to Jesus. No, he came to Jesus with his own idea of what he wants from Jesus – "lay your hands on her," he says – as if Jesus needs to be told how it's done.

¹ As quoted in "75 Years of Stick-to-it-ivity," AP article, September 22, 1996.

Same with the woman. She comes to Jesus with it all figured out – “If I but touch his clothes....” She says. In her shame, she comes up behind Jesus in the crowd, doesn’t even speak to him about her ailment.

When we are so desperate as to fall down before the Lord, don’t we often do so with a preconceived idea of what’s needed? “Lord, take away the pain;” “Lord, lead me to that next job;” “Lord, make him more loving; make her more agreeable.”

Seldom do we come to the Lord asking what God wants for our lives, what God wants of us in that situation. And still, in the grace and mercy of the Lord, God reaches out to us and ministers to our need.

And if we’re open to it, and if we have just a mustard seed of faith, we receive the blessing of God and enter into the joy of the Lord.

The great spiritual teacher Henri Nouwen encourages us to learn the discipline of being surprised, not by suffering, but by joy. “As we grow old,” says Nouwen, “... there is suffering ahead of us, immense suffering, a suffering that will continue to tempt us to think that we have chosen the wrong road.

... But don’t be surprised by pain,” he says. “Be surprised by joy, be surprised by the little flower that shows its beauty in the midst of a barren desert and be surprised by the immense healing power that keeps bursting forth like springs of fresh water from the depth of our pain.”² It’s all about expectations.

Can you imagine turning your life and your struggles over to the Lord so fully that he surprises you with unimaginable healing and comfort?

Can you imagine the surprise of the man when Jesus says to those weeping and wailing over the death of his daughter, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? This child is not dead but sleeping?”

The man came to Jesus asking for healing for his dying child, and Jesus is ready to do so much more. Jesus looks beyond the death of the child to the life that is to come. Jesus looks at her lifeless body and says, “Talitha cum; ... Little girl, get up!” bringing her back to life.

Same with the woman. The woman came to Jesus certain that just touching his cloak will be enough to heal her uncontrollable bleeding, and Jesus is ready to do so much more. Jesus looks beyond her physical ailment to her need for the unconditional love and acceptance of God.

² Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Finding My Way Home: Pathways to Life and the Spirit* (Crossroad, 2004).

Jesus is not satisfied merely knowing that someone was physically cured, not when her pain and agony run so much deeper. So Jesus looks “all round to see who had (touched him),” he looks to see her and know her.

And that’s when the woman falls “down before him,” says Mark, “and (tells) him the whole truth” – the whole truth about how she has suffered for 12 long years as a social outcast. She tells how she can never be ritually clean because of all the blood, never be accepted and embraced by her family and her community.

As she reveals the depth of her pain and suffering, Jesus turns to her and says, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.”

With that one word, “daughter,” Jesus embraces her in the unconditional love of God, and with that, he restores her to her community.

What might Jesus see as the cure or the healing or the renewal that you need, the new life that’s waiting for you on the other side of whatever you’re dealing with right now? Just imagine what Jesus would want for you.

As you think about that, look beyond your own understanding of the problem, the ailment. Look beyond your certainty about the limitations – what’s possible, what you might be able to do or achieve, what you can envision and expect?

Look beyond these limitations and open yourself up to what Jesus might see – not a dead-end, but just the beginning. Open yourself up to the Lord, look at things through his eyes, ask the Lord to show you what he sees, show you what God desires for you and from you.

That’s not an easy thing to do – being open and honest and receptive before the Lord. It takes an act of great desperation and great faith – the desperation of a father losing his beloved child, the faith of a woman who has no one else to turn to. In the midst of such desperation and faith, - lifted up to the Lord with an open and honest and receptive heart - that’s where the impossible becomes possible; that’s where blessing is added upon blessing; that’s where a new lease on life is given, beyond the pain, beyond the struggle, beyond the suffering, beyond what you could ever ask or image of the Lord. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O Lord our God and Savior, who sent the disciples and apostles to the very ends of the earth to teach and proclaim your message, to heal all illnesses and to reveal the mysteries of the faith, send us your blessing and enlighten our understanding.

Bless us with the gift of perseverance and a lasting hope. By your Spirit, enable us to do and to act in accordance with your example and commands as set out in the gospel. May the fruit of the gospel be increased in us many times over.

We pray, too, for the health and wellbeing of those who need you most. We pray your Spirit of peace and comfort upon those who are grieving.

And now, to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, Jesus who taught us to pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.