

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Food for the Soul”
Mark 5:21-43
January 24, 2016

If scripture is food for the soul, then you might say Mark is a fan of sandwiches. He’s giving us one today and he’s got sandwiches spread out throughout his gospel. I guess you could say that the Gospel of Mark is like a Subway platter that way.

Our story today begins with a synagogue leader named Jairus, and his story is the bread. It’s there at the beginning and the ending. It’s on the top and the bottom of our reading today. And it’s a good story. It could stand on it’s own and speak to us in all kinds of ways. Maybe you could even say it’s like multi-grain bread that’s full of all kinds of nutrients. You could give each of us just a few slices of this bread for lunch and it would absolutely sustain you. We could read the story about Jairus and his daughter and ignore the bleeding woman... and there’d still be a healthy dose of scripture for us to digest.

But Mark gives us more than two slices of bread. He gives us filling in between – the meat, the lettuce, cheese, tomato, and pickle. That’s the story about the bleeding woman. It comes in the middle, connects the two halves of Jairus’ story. It connects our two pieces of bread. And, just like the story of Jairus, the story of the bleeding woman is pretty filling in itself. In fact, if we are on the Atkins diet, then we might be used to just eating a breadless sandwich. And it’s not a bad lunch, right? It’s filling and healthy. There’s plenty there for us.

But, again, Mark gives us the whole sandwich, the multi-grain bread, with all the good fillings. Mark gives us these two stories, one within the other, so that we’ll have to read them together. It’s part of the artistry of Mark as a gospel writer. Like I said, he uses this technique all over his gospel... but this passage today is certainly one of the clearest examples of it.

Now one of the things about eating a sandwich is that often we eat them differently when we are young than when we’ve grown up. I don’t know about your kids, but when we give our kids a sandwich, especially in those toddler/preschool years, they’re more than likely to take it apart... to eat the bread separate from the cheese... and separate from the smoked turkey.

Your kids did this too right? At some developmental level, they are still learning what each food tastes like and feels like going down. It takes awhile before they acquires a taste for the sandwich as a whole. First they need to know what each part is all about.

And I think that is a good place for us to being with Mark’s sandwich. So we’re going to move through this layer by layer, chewing on each part of these stories before we try to eat this sandwich as a whole.

So, on top, we have Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, and apparently worthy of noting. There aren’t many people besides the disciples, who are actually ***named*** in the gospels. There are all kinds of ***unnamed*** Pharisees and sinners, of unnamed Gentiles and Jews, that we hear about, but it is very rare for us to learn any of their names.

So, Jairus is an exception. He must have been worth noting. His was a name people recognized. He's a leader in the synagogue and probably respected leader in his community. *Jairus was what you'd call an insider- culturally, religiously, socially – he was on the inside. People liked him.*

Jesus has just gotten off the boat from crossing the Sea of Galilee. He's there at the water's edge, and are all kinds of people bustling about on the shore. I know it's hard to picture this time of the year, but I imagine it was something like being at the Lake of the Ozarks, or down at Tablerock during 4th of July weekend. It was crowded. There were a lot of people there... and Jairus, is one of them.

By chance he looks up and spots Jesus and it catches his breath. He's tried everything in his power to help his dying daughter... but his power hasn't been enough, and he's feeling helpless. But maybe... this trouble-making-wonder-worker could do something. And so Jairus pushes his way through the crowd, and in desperate hope, throws himself at the feet of Jesus, begging for his help.

You know, it wasn't very becoming of a synagogue leader. He wasn't acting like the important man that he was. He was acting like a man out of his mind with fear and desperation and hysteria. It was probably a bit embarrassing for those standing around who recognized him. Jairus throws himself at Jesus' feet and starts begging:

“Please. My little daughter is dying. Please come and touch her, and make her whole... Please... it's my little daughter.” he says.

She wasn't all that little, really. She was 12 years old, going on 13. I imagine Jairus calls her his “Little Daughter,” because no matter what happens, she'll always be his little girl. His child was dying... which of course meant that he was dying. And so he is on his knees pleading with Jesus... his last hope. And Jesus agrees to go with him.

That's the top layer of our sandwich this morning. There's a lot there in that piece of bread... a lot for us to digest. This one piece of bread is full of desperate hope and faith that is willing to throw dignity to the wind... that's willing to throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus and bear our broken hearts and broken hopes before him.

Take a bite out of **that** for a moment...
chew it up... and swallow it deep down inside of you...
where your **hopes** have dried up
and your skepticism, your pride, your dignity keeps you at a safe distance from God.
What does this bread of life taste like going down?

I'd venture to guess, you need more than one bite this morning, but I'm going to have to hold you off for just a moment. I don't mean to interrupt your meal, but Jesus was interrupted on his way to Jairus' house. So, take what's left of that piece of bread and set it aside for a moment. We'll come back to it. Let's make our way through the lettuce, cheese, and smoked turkey.

In the crowd that day there was a woman, a desperate woman, who has been bleeding as long as Jairus' daughter has been alive. She's been bleeding for 12 years... which means she has been unclean for 12 years. She has been ostracized from worship at the temple. She's been isolated for 12 long years. No one would touch *her*. She is unclean...

And I imagine that she must be so tired... Her lifeblood has been flowing out of her for more than a decade,

and she has spent every dime she has
and every ounce of energy she has
on trying to get better...
but none of it has worked.

This woman is as good as dead in her world. No one wanted to see her. If she were coming down the street toward you, you would cross to the other side and pretend not to have noticed. There were no casseroles being baked for *her*. No collections to pay *her* bills.

She had every possible obstacle in her culture:

she was a Woman,
she was unclean
she was poor...
and surely all that must have meant she was cursed by God.
That's what they believed,
and so she was cursed by her community... (Gloer).

And yet she refused to give into despair. She held onto some kind of desperate, stubborn, determined, hope. She wove her way through the crowded streets, sunk up behind Jesus and in desperation, she reached out to touch him.

It was an audacious thing to do. In the Jewish culture at that time, a woman should never touch a man in public... and to top it off, she was an unclean woman touching a holy man. This would bring shame on her and really shame on the whole town.

And so, when Jesus asks who touched him, she knew she was caught. And, just like Jairus, she throws herself at the feet of Jesus. Everyone around her must have been filled with shock and embarrassment, and even outrage that she would do this "to them." ...making them look bad in that way.

But Jesus looks at her and addresses her with a most endearing term. **"Daughter..."** he says to her. **"Daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace."** Or for a more literal translation from the Greek, **"Daughter your faith has saved you."**

Jesus stops on his way to Jairus' daughter... in order to bless and affirm and heal this daughter...

this daughter who was an embarrassment to everyone around her,
this daughter who infected anyone she touched.
But of all the people in the crowd that day, Jesus begins with her, and blesses her: an unclean-woman, an outcast, the trash of society.

Take a bite out of that slice of cheese... and see how it settles in your stomach. I imagine for some of us, it might taste a little pungent. It must have for Jairus... who can't believe Jesus is stopping to talk to *her*, when he's in such a desperate hurry. Jairus, who must be ready to explode

with impatience... and maybe outrage that Jesus is ignoring his situation... for *this woman*. Remember, there's that other piece of bread waiting for us... and Jairus knew there wasn't much time to get there. In fact, there was no time.

While Jesus was still talking to this woman, Jairus got news that *his little girl, his daughter*, has died. So let's pick up this last piece of bread and start to notice how it might start to look a lot like your own experience.

Jairus' journey with Jesus is a lot like ours at times. It may begin out of desperation, or out of humility, or maybe just a greater awareness. And we invite this Christ to come into our lives, to be our great healer, to be our great savior. "Please come" we ask with Jairus.

And he does. And hope seems to rise... But then something happens, as if Jesus stops and turns aside... and we're left waiting. *This* is where the life of faith is lived. This is where we all are... waiting... somewhere between hope and desperation and fulfillment.

And it can be incredibly frustrating. Imagine how Jairus felt as he watched Jesus with this woman. Some of you know what that's like... watching God meet someone else's needs, while yours seem to go ignored. And you can't help but ask:

Why is Jesus with her? and not me?
why him? and not me?
why isn't he coming to my home?

This is what the journey of faith is so often like. There is a waiting... And sometimes that waiting can be incredibly painful. Jairus is waiting for Jesus... and while he waits, his whole world comes crashing down around him. He gets word his little girl has died.

And he feels like he failed his daughter. He failed his wife. He did everything he could... but it still wasn't enough. He was too late. And whatever notions of control or importance were still hanging on in Jairus' heart and mind have completely fallen to pieces.

Some of you saw the quote I posted on our Facebook page a week ago. It comes from Gregory Meyers, who writes, **"The longer you live, the more you learn that you cannot control your life very much. You are in control of very little, as a matter of fact. The more you realize this fact, the more likely you will enjoy life, the natural ecstasy inherent in life itself. This doesn't mean that the external circumstances bend to your pleasure. It means you cease judging life, circumstances, and events on the basis of your personal comfort and desires.**

[In Christianity, we] call this 'living the Will of God.' [When you're able to do that] something happens, something indescribable. We are living in the Mystery, or perhaps to say it better, the Mystery is living us."¹

And so, in that moment, where everything is loss for Jairus, Jesus says to him a really strange thing, **"Don't be afraid; Just believe."** Just believe. Don't be afraid. Surrender to the mystery.

And then Jesus makes the rest of the Journey to Jairus' home. And he walks with those broken-hearted parents into the room where their dead daughter lay on her bed.

Her skin: white and clammy. Her hands: folded across her stomach.

¹ Gregory Meyers, *Listen to the Desert: Secrets of Spiritual Maturity from the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, 28.

And Jesus reaches down, and touches her. He takes her by the hand, and the power of life within him comes surging out.

“*Talitha kum!*” he says, “*Little girl, get up!*”

And somehow she does...

Just like Lazareth walking out of the tomb, she gets up.

And that’s the bottom of our sandwich today, the last piece of bread. So, let me invite you to put it all back together. Stack the turkey and lettuce and cheese back on top of that last piece of bread... And take that first slice of bread that we already bit out of and set it on top of the whole thing.

Now, lets pick this sandwich and bite into it like an adult who knows that the whole is better than the sum of its parts. Chew it up and swallow it deep down inside of you, where you’ll begin to be filled with more than a few ancient healing stories.

Now we are being filled with *the Great Story*.... the Great Story that is never really about how to get God to do what we want... which is really just another way of trying to stay in control. Instead it is a story about who God is, and how God acts, and what God is like... (B. B. Taylor)

These stories are about a God who isn’t concerned with our rules of propriety or how to behave, or keeping a good reputation.

God is concerned with people...

and especially the people we want to forget.

They are stories about a God who is willing to reach out and touch and be touched by everyone... by all of us... from the greatest to the least, if we will throw ourselves at God’s feet.

These stories are about more than healing. They are about wholeness... and new life and new beginnings. These are salvation stories... salvation that happens along the way with Christ.

When we bite into the whole sandwich we begin to know that God’s power is stronger than any of the powers in this world that want to make us unclean, or trap us, or somehow make us less.

Instead, the power of God pushes back the other way. Rather than making Jesus unclean, the power of God flows out of him making the unclean whole. It flows out of Jesus making filling was seems dead with new life.

So take and eat this food for your soul.

Be filled with the power of God that is the power to change you, and me... and the whole world.

And while you’re waiting for that change to come,

don’t be afraid. Just believe.

Amen.

Reflection

You called, you cried, you shattered my deafness. You sparkled, you blazed, you drove away my blindness. You shed your fragrance, and I drew in my breath, and I pant for you. I tasted and now I hunger and thirst. You touched me, and now I burn with longing for your peace.

- Saint Augustine