

Jesus Didn't Go to Hogwarts

Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and 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." So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. 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."

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?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And 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. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Our Scripture reading this morning is just a bit longer than what we are used to reading on a Sunday morning. If you're anything like me, that means you sort of zoned out a bit at some point during the story. And if we're going to understand this story this morning, we need to be sure we heard the whole thing. So let's start this morning by recapping the story.

Last Sunday, if you joined us in the park, you remember we read a story about Jesus and the disciples getting into a boat and going to the other side of the lake. Our reading this morning begins with Jesus and the disciples returning to their home side of the lake. And in no big surprise, a crowd was there waiting for him to return. Among the people there was a man named Jairus, an important town official, a Synagogue leader. Sadly, Jairus' daughter is very ill. Because of his social status, chances are Jairus has lots of resources at his disposal. He's probably contacted all sorts of other people who are known for performing healings and magic. But nothing has worked, so he's come to Jesus. He says, "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.” And Jesus is willing to follow him.

As they head off, we get what is one of the most interesting literary scenes in the Gospel of Mark. Remember, Mark’s not much of a story teller. His is the shortest gospel, and he sort of gives us a “Just the Facts, Ma’am” version of Jesus’ life. But here in chapter five, Mark actually interrupts the story of Jairus to tell us another story. He’ll get back to Jairus shortly, but first we hear about something that happens along the way.

There’s a great crowd surrounding Jesus, and among them is a desperate woman. We don’t know her name or anything about her, except that she’s had some sort of bleeding disorder for 12 years. According to the Jewish purity laws, not only was this a physical problem for her, but it was a spiritual problem. The bleeding had made her unclean for 12 long years. Years during which she had to keep herself separated from other people. That’s a long time of enforced exile. So what is this woman doing in a crowd of people? She’s so desperate to be healed, she willing to risk any consequences of breaking the purity laws.

She reaches out to touch Jesus’ cloak, thinking that simply the touch of his garment will heal her. And if she can just touch his cloak, then maybe she can sneak back out of the crowd, and no one will know she was breaking the purity laws. But Jesus senses that power has gone out of him. He stops walking and says to the crowd, “Who touched me?” The disciples are dumbfounded. They are standing in a crowd of people, shoulder-to-shoulder. Who hasn’t touched Jesus? The woman admits what she has done, afraid that she is in trouble. But instead, Jesus tells her to go safely on her way, because her faith has healed her.

Now we return to the plotline around Jairus and his daughter. A messenger from his household comes running with the news that the daughter has died. Jesus’ services are no longer

required. But Jesus tells Jairus to have faith, and continues on to his house. Once there, he makes his way past the mourners, telling them that the girl is not dead, but only sleeping. They don't believe him, but he goes into the girl's room and tells her to get up. When she does, her parents are amazed, but Jesus simply tells them to give her something to eat – indicating that she is now healed.

It's a long Scripture passage, but what we have here this morning is one healing story embedded in another. And I can see why Mark did that – these two stories have a lot in common. First, both the bleeding woman and the Synagogue leader are desperate people. We see the woman's desperation in her blatant disregard for purity laws. We see the leader's desperation when a man of high social status approaches Jesus himself, rather than sending a messenger. Both, obviously, are looking for physical healing. And both think it is Jesus touch that will heal.

This is obvious with the bleeding woman. She doesn't even need Jesus to touch her; she wants simply to touch his clothes. But remember Jairus, when he asks for Jesus' help, asks him to come lay hands on his daughter. But is it really that simple? Was Jesus' body so divine that simply brushing up against him would bring healing? That seems a little unbelievable to me. I think Jesus used touch the way we use Sacraments today – to make God's presence and power visible.

In baptism, there's nothing special about the water. It's just water. But it helps us to see and hear and feel what's happening in the ritual of baptism. The real power of baptism isn't in the water, but in the presence of God. And the same is true at communion. That grape juice is just plain old Welch's. But when we drink it in the context of our communion ritual, it becomes a powerful, visible, tasetable symbol of God's very presence in and among us. When Jesus healed people or cast out demons, he often touched them. But he tells the bleeding woman this morning

that it's not his touch that has caused the healing. Rather, he says, it is her faith that has healed her. The touch just makes that visible for the rest of us.

But if it isn't Jesus' touch that heals, if it is our faith, we have another, perhaps more troubling issue to contend with. You and I could spend the rest of the week sitting here telling one another stories about people we know who are good, honest, faithful people who have had tragedies happen. Who have prayed for healing but received none. In the Middle Ages, priests said that a lack of healing was scientific proof of a lack of faith. And even though we know today that there are all sorts of other factors at play in our physical health, we sometimes find that pieces of this logic still hide in the corners of our minds.

We tend to follow a progression of prayer. When someone we love gets sick, we pray for their healing. If they don't improve, we pray harder – perhaps including doctors and care givers in our prayers. If they still don't get better, we enlist more people to pray. Jesus said on more than one occasion, “Your faith has healed you,” and so we keep trying to tap a strong enough source of faith to make a difference.

There are two lessons here that we need to apply to this and other healing stories. First, miracles aren't magic. Magic follows specific, set laws. I'm not talking about Houdini's magic and sleight of hand. I'm talking about the magic found in fantasy. The magic of Harry Potter. Harry goes to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to learn the laws of magic. There are things they can and can't do. You can make bad food better, but you can't make food out of thin air. There are ways to do things right and wrong. If you pronounce a spell incorrectly, things may not go as planned.

But miracles are different than magic. If magic follows set laws, miracles are unpredictable. You can't make a miracle happen by following any sort of formula. If a miracle is

going to happen, Jesus says we must first have faith. But that doesn't mean that the opposite is true. Just by having faith, we can't make a miracle happen. And that's so frustrating. We want to understand when and why and how God is willing to intervene with miracles. But the truth of the matter is, we just don't and can't know. God is unpredictable that way. We can't recreate a set of circumstances that will bring a miracle. All we can do, Jesus says, is to have faith.

The second lesson we need to apply to healing stories is a language lesson. For this one, we're all going to have to learn a little ancient Greek this morning. Both the Synagogue leader and Jesus use the same verb this morning. In English, we read a translation like "get well" or "healed." But the Greek word here is *sozo*, and it means "to save." In a medical context, we might use the word saved by saying, "Thank you doctor; you saved my life."

But in a spiritual context, we use the word saved to mean a whole different thing, don't we? We mean that something has happened to our souls. We may refer to a sense of calm and comfort for right now, or we might be talking about being saved as a future event when we get to share in eternal life with God. So what does Jesus mean when he uses this word *sozo*? Is he talking about physical healing, or is he referring to a spiritual event?

Well, Jesus had a more holistic way of looking at the word 'saved.' He didn't put physical healing in one corner and spiritual salvation in another. They were two sides of the same coin – because each of us exists physically and spiritually at the same time. Think about it in terms of the bleeding woman. For 12 years, she had lived as an exile from her people. By healing her physically, Jesus has also ended her separation from her people. He has also made it possible for her to return to the temple and her worshipping community as well.

When we think about healing, we need to think in these terms – physically, socially, and spiritually. Go back through the gospels and look at the healing stories. Although we interpret

most of them as stories of physical healing, some of them make more sense as stories of social or spiritual healing. And in my book, that's not any less important or any less of a miracle.

And in our own lives, when we pray for healing, we may not always receive physical healing. Even when our prayer is for physical healing, Jesus can see what it is that we truly, deeply crave. And often, that's a different kind of healing. And this is why we have faith. Not that Jesus will heal all our physical ills, but that he will offer us a deep kind of salvation. Amen and amen.