

AUTHORITY OVER DEATH

Mark 5:21-43

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

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Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 5, verses 21 through 43. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 5, beginning at verse 21, we read in Jesus' name.

²¹ And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. ²² Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet ²³ and implored him earnestly, saying, "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." ²⁴ And he went with him.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. ²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸ For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." ²⁹ And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "**Who touched my garments?**" ³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, '**Who touched me?**'" ³² And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ And he said to her, "**Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.**"

³⁵ While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "**Do not fear, only believe.**" ³⁷ And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ And when he had entered, he said to them, "**Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.**" ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. But 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. ⁴¹ Taking her by the hand he said to her, "**Talitha cumi,**" which means, "**Little girl, I say to you, arise.**" ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. ⁴³ And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

AUTHORITY OVER DEATH (Mark 5:21-43)

Jesus has authority over illness and death. This historical account reveals the authority of Jesus and that he uses that authority for our good. The world—we've noticed this before, and we will continue to notice this—the world is in a constant power struggle. Who has the power? How can I get the power? What will I do for myself and my group when I get power? The sinful abuse of authority is to grab power and use it for one's own benefit. But God instituted authority, not for the benefit of the person in authority, but to serve those under authority. That, after all, is how God uses his authority. Last week Jesus used his authority over the wind and the sea to save his disciples. In this gospel lesson, Jesus uses his authority over illness and death to save a woman and a little girl.

Jesus has authority over illness. He even has authority over death. And he uses this authority for our good. That's the basic point. There is more, so we'll dig a little deeper. And we should want to go deeper. And what we find deep in the details reinforces the basic point by adding color and depth.

Jesus had just gotten out of a boat when Jairus, the father of the sick girl, fell down at Jesus' feet and implored him to come and heal his daughter.

And this is kind of interesting. Jairus is something of an outlier in the gospels. He was a ruler of the synagogue. That doesn't quite put him on the level of the chief priests in Jerusalem, but Jairus is something of an important person. And this was the group of persons who often opposed Jesus. These were the kind of folks who got mad at Jesus for healing people on the Sabbath day. So Jairus, along with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, is an example that not all of the religious leaders opposed Jesus. Some of them were believers.

And there's an apologetic significance to this, because we know his name, we know where he lived, we know what he did, we know he was in a position respected by the community, and he was an eyewitness to the power of Jesus. He saw it with his very own eyes when Jesus raised his daughter back to life. Jairus was an identifiable person in Galilee. And this is important whenever we are looking to establish the truth of what happened. When a journalist writes a story, or when a lawyer makes a case in court, they need to have identifiable sources who can verify a given claim. Anonymous sources just don't cut it. It doesn't work in journalism, and it certainly doesn't work in court. It also doesn't work in historical study. That's why Jairus and others like him are significant to us. They were identifiable eyewitnesses who could verify that these things actually occurred.

So Jairus is significant for historical reasons. He's also interesting on a spiritual level, because many of the synagogue leaders and Pharisees hated Jesus. But Jairus believed in him. Why? It may be that he was already a believing Israelite who was looking for the Kingdom of God. So when Jesus comes along, he sees in him what he has been waiting for. It could also have something to do with Jairus' need. He had a sick daughter. He knew he needed Jesus' help. The primary reason many of the religious leaders did not believe in Jesus is that they did not know their own need. They considered themselves to be righteous by their own good works or because of their national heritage. They didn't think they needed the forgiveness Jesus was preaching. So they opposed him, even when they witnessed his miracles. But Jairus had a sick daughter, so he knew his need. He was face to face with death, but it was worse than facing his own death. It was his daughter's. She was right on the edge of it. There was no time for pride. He needed Jesus. Death brings us face to face with our sin, because death is the consequence of sin. If we weren't sinners, we wouldn't die. But we do die. And this has a way of reminding us, in our souls, that we are sinful. Death has a way of preaching the Law with a severity that words cannot express.

So Jairus knew his need, and he came to Jesus for help. Think of the love a father has for his daughter. A father will do anything to protect his son. But for his daughter, he will do anything, plus a little bit more. That's just how it is, and the boys of the world need to be okay with that. Someday they will understand. There's a special kind of love that a father has for his daughter. We see a little glimpse of this in the way Jairus talks about his daughter. He comes to Jesus and says, "My little daughter is at the point of death" (5:23). He calls her "little." At this point, at least in my mind, I picture a small child, like a toddler, or maybe a five-year-old. It's only at the very end of the text when we learn that she's twelve years old. That's about the age when a girl starts to think she's basically a grown up, but in her father's eyes, she's still a little girl, especially if she's sick.

So Jairus implores Jesus to come, and Jesus goes with him. But they get delayed. There's a great crowd that was thronging about Jesus, so that slows them down a bit. Then there's a woman who had been sick for twelve years. You might notice that's the same as the age of the girl, twelve years. So there's a link between the woman and the girl, and we'll soon see what the point of it is. This woman had a flow of blood, like a hemorrhage. And she had spent all the money she had on doctors who were unable to heal her. In fact, their doctoring actually made her worse. We can deduce about this woman that she was wealthy, or rather that she had been wealthy, because in those days it was only the rich who could afford doctors. But this woman had now spent everything. So now she was poor, and she was sicker than ever.

But she had heard the reports of Jesus, and she believed. She had not seen it with her own eyes, but "faith comes by hearing" (Rom. 10:17), and this woman heard and believed in Jesus. So she has a plan. If she can only touch Jesus' garment, she believes that she will be healed. This is a bold plan. Because of her flow of blood, this woman was ceremonially unclean (Lev. 15:25-33). That means that she was not permitted to participate in the religious activities of Israel. And anyone she touches would become unclean, not permanently, but for an inconvenient period of time. Perhaps this is why she just wants to touch Jesus' garment. Maybe she can sneak a touch without anyone knowing. So that's her plan, and it works! She can feel in her body that the flow of blood dried up. Much to her dismay, Jesus also feels it. And Jesus stops and makes a scene.

This is not what the woman wanted, and I suspect it's not what Jairus wanted either. At this point the text really slows down. This doesn't really come through in English, but in Greek you could use different forms of verbs to communicate the pace of events. And up until this point, everything is fast paced. The style of writing communicated urgency, because Jairus has a sick daughter who is at the point of death. And the healing of the woman is immediate. But when Jesus turns around, everything goes in slow motion. Mark switches to the verb forms that communicate a slow pace of events. It wasn't just that Jesus asked once, "**Who touched my garments?**" (5:30), but he was continually asking this, and there was a conversation that developed with the disciples about how they're in a big crowd, and there were lots of people brushing up against each other. It doesn't come through so much in English, but in Greek, the form of the verbs indicates slowness. And I wonder what Jairus is thinking through all this, because his daughter is moments from death. He might be more patient than I am, but I would be thinking, *Come on, Jesus! Let's go! Who cares who touched you?*

Eventually the woman fesses up. I imagine that when Jesus said, "**Who touched me?**" everyone took a step back. So imagine this circle in the middle of the crowd, and Jesus was in the middle of the circle all by himself, and then this woman stepped forward and fell down at Jesus' feet. She confessed what she had done. And Jesus said to her, "Woman." No. He calls her

something else. He calls her, **“Daughter”** (5:34). This lady is probably older than Jesus, but Jesus calls her, **“Daughter.”** This is the point of the link between the woman and the twelve-year-old girl. Remember that frantic, do anything kind of love that Jairus has for his little daughter? That’s the kind of love Jesus has for this woman. He says, **“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease”** (5:34). This is the love God has for his children.

There’s an interesting paradox of faith here. On one hand, it seems like faith does everything, but on the other hand, faith really does nothing, because Jesus is the real power. The woman believes that if she merely touches Jesus’ garment, she will be healed. And it works. And it’s kind of funny, because Jesus was in a large crowd. Lots of people were brushing up against him. But none of them were healed. Surely, someone else must have had a sore ankle or a cataract or something. But it’s just this woman. And imagine, all throughout Jesus’ life, how many people must have touched him or just brushed up against his clothes, but only this woman was healed by doing so. Why? Because of her faith. She believed Jesus has this power. So her healing depends on her faith, but the power isn’t actually in her faith. The power is in Jesus. We learn this directly from the text when it says that Jesus perceived that power had gone out from him (5:30). So what would have happened if the woman believed she could be healed by touching Peter’s garment or John’s garment? Nothing. What if she believed with all her heart that she could be healed by praying ten Hail Maries or going to a healing service or making a pilgrimage to the holy land? Again, nothing. Why? Because that’s not where the power is. The power is not in those things, and it is not really in our faith. The power is in Jesus.

So we see that faith is necessary, but faith has no power of its own. The power is all in the one we trust, Jesus Christ. So faith is necessary, not because it has any power, and not because it assists God in any way, but faith is the means or instrument by which we lay hold of Christ. So faith is necessary, and faith is powerful to save, because faith trusts in Jesus Christ, who has all power and authority. And faith in Jesus Christ is the only kind of faith that counts for anything. Faith in anything else or anyone else is empty, because no one else and nothing else has power to save us.

And it’s not like we need to touch Jesus to be saved. In both of these miracles, people seek Jesus’ touch. Jairus asks Jesus to lay hands on his daughter, and this woman seeks to touch Jesus’ garment. And they do touch Jesus. But Jesus shifts the emphasis to his words. To the bleeding woman, Jesus says, **“Your faith has made you well.”** Then he declares to her, **“Go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”** Jesus shifts the emphasis to the power of his words. In the end she is healed because Jesus says so.

So that’s the delay. Remember, this didn’t start out as a story about the bleeding woman. It started with a sick girl and a daddy who came to Jesus for help. The bleeding woman delayed Jesus. And sure enough, just as we feared, during this delay, **“There came from the ruler’s house some who said, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?’ ”** (5:35). Even if Jesus hadn’t been delayed, Jairus’ daughter might still have died before he got there. But I wonder what’s going through Jairus’ mind. I know what I would have thought. But Jesus does not allow those thoughts to linger. He does not even give Jairus an opportunity to speak. He overheard the tragic news, and he says to Jairus, **“Do not fear, only believe”** (5:36). Again, Jesus’ words drive away fear. The bleeding woman fell before Jesus in fear and trembling. But Jesus

graciously addressed her as “**Daughter.**” Now he says to Jairus, “**Do not fear.**” Whether she is sick or dead doesn’t really matter to Jesus.

So Jesus proceeds to Jairus’ house. And he does not permit the crowd to follow him. Only Peter, James, and John are allowed to go. He doesn’t even take the other nine disciples. And when they get to the house, he kicks everyone out except the girls’ parents. They get to see this miracle. He takes the dead girl by the hand, just as Jairus requested. But the emphasis shifts again from Jesus’ touch to his words. He says, “**Talitha cumi**” (5:41). That’s Aramaic. And, if I remember correctly, there are only two other places where the gospel writers preserve Jesus’ words in Aramaic. It’s a point of emphasis to show that these words are really important. They mean, “**Little girl, I say to you, arise**” (5:41). “And immediately the girl got up and began walking” (5:42). The power was in Jesus’ words. And it’s interesting that the girl didn’t go from dead back to being sick. She went from dead to being completely well. In the hospital, if they shock you with those paddles to bring you back, the paddles don’t heal you. They merely resuscitate you. Whatever caused your heart to stop is still a problem. But Jesus’ healing is instant and complete. He exercises authority over illness and death.

Jesus has authority over illness and death. And he uses this authority for our good. The reason he has this authority is because he died and rose again. He gave these two daughters a foretaste of it, even before he died and rose again. Illness and death are the consequence of sin. Jesus paid for sin at the cross. Therefore, sin has lost its power over us. And if sin has lost its power, so have illness and death. So at the return of Jesus, he will call us out of death, just as he called that little girl out of death. And when he calls us out of death, he will heal us completely.

Sometimes, when we suffer in these mortal bodies, we want to be done with them. We look forward to heaven, where we won’t have to put up with weak hearts, achy knees, irritable bowels, and all the rest. We want to be done with all that. But we will have bodies in the resurrection, and this is good. So sometimes Christians talk about our new bodies. And I say to people, “Well, it’s not really going to be a new body. Jesus is going to raise this body.” Then there’s a look of disappointment, because this body isn’t all that great, and it keeps getting worse. But it’s new in the sense that if you perfectly restore an old car, you can say it’s new again. It’s not like you fix the one part that made it break down, but you restore the whole thing. That’s what it will be like when Jesus raises us from the dead. He’s not just going to fix the one thing that finally did us in. He’s going to fix everything perfectly and permanently. When he raises us from the dead, he will completely restore the image of God in us. He will raise us better than we ever have been. That’s the kind of resurrection we are looking forward to. We saw a glimpse of it in these two daughters, and we will experience it fully on the Last Day.

Jesus has authority over illness and death because he won the victory over sin. And he uses his authority for our good. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.