

Desperate Measures for Desperate Needs

Are you ready for another boat trip across lake Galilee? Two weeks ago we sailed from the Jewish side of the lake and got caught up in a storm. Last Sunday we made it to the southeastern shore and met up with a herd of swine and a man full of demons. We've seen Jesus calm the storms at sea and in the man.

Today we return to Jewish society on the west bank. Our voyage across the lake this time has been uneventful. But no sooner do we arrive on shore than we are caught up in another storm of human need. We encounter an anxious father with a dying child and a desperate woman who has been bleeding to death for twelve long years.

Mark's presentation of these two stories is interesting, because he gives them to us as a story within a story. We start with Jarius coming to Jesus with a plea for help. Then, when Jesus is on the way to Jarius' house the first story is interrupted by the second. An unnamed woman sneaks up behind Jesus in the crowd and touches His cloak. She is instantly healed of her disease. After ministering to this woman, Jesus continues to Jarius' house to minister to his daughter.

The blending of these two stories invites us to see if and how they are related, invites us to look at the main characters and to see how they are different and how they are the same. We begin with Jarius and ask the question, "Who was Jarius?" The answer given within the passage is that Jarius was the ruler of the synagogue, which suggests several things: Jarius was a man of importance. He was in good standing with the scribes and pharisees, the keepers and teachers of the law. He probably had a reasonable measure of wealth. He was considered a righteous man, religiously in good standing. Jarius was "a somebody."

The second question is, "Who was the woman who interrupted the rescue of Jarius' daughter and diverted Jesus' attention from this primary mission?" The answer is that she was a woman. We do not even know her name. We do know that she was poor, because she had spent all her money on doctors who were unable to help her. We know that she had a constant issue of blood, and this fact tells us more.

Blood has an interesting place in Scripture. On the one hand, it is a very precious thing. It was the blood of the sacrificial animals that was offered on the altar for the forgiveness of Israel's sins. The Bible says, that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. We believe that the blood of Jesus was shed for us on the cross and is the means for our forgiveness today. We celebrate that in the cup of our Communion, "His blood given for us." On the other hand, blood

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seeping from a wound or the blood of a woman in her menstrual cycle was considered unclean. Anytime someone was bleeding, they were considered religiously unclean and anyone who touched such a person was considered unclean also. This woman had been bleeding for 12 years, so for 12 years she was banned from public worship and public appearance. If she had a husband, he was not allowed to touch her nor she him. For all practical purposes she was as a leper, cut off from intimacy with others. As far as the society was concerned she was a nobody. She had no status in the community, no money, no intimate contact with her family, no access to public worship. Jarius was close to the top of that society; the woman with the issuance of blood was near or at the bottom.

And so, the way the story unfolds what we see is this, something very precious: Jesus, while on His way to minister to one of the most important members of society, stops to minister and to care for someone at the bottom. This tells us something about Jesus, doesn't it? As far as Jesus is concerned, this poor forsaken unclean woman at the bottom of society is just as important, if not more important, than a man at the top. All people matter to God.

Maybe you have thought at some point that you and your concerns are of no consequence to God. I've heard people say it: "God has more important things to worry about than me, He wouldn't take time for me." Anyone who has ever thought that is wrong on two counts. #1 God doesn't worry. And, #2 God cares about you and wants to minister to your needs. He's just waiting for you to come to Him.

Jarius and an unnamed woman, a man and a woman, well-healed and dead broke, a man of importance and a woman with no status, ruler of the synagogue and a woman not allowed in the door. The contrast could hardly be any sharper. But, then, we ask another question: "What do these two people have in common, in what sense is their story the same?" The answer comes back that they are both desperate for God's help. Each one is at the end of their respective ropes. Home remedies have failed, the doctors have failed; Jarius' little daughter is dying and the woman's bleeding won't stop. First, they are united in their desperation.

Secondly, they are united in their desperate actions. As the old saying goes, "desperate times demand desperate measures." Most of the Jewish leaders at that time had already turned against Jesus. They saw Him as a troublemaker, an illegitimate rabbi, a threat to their authority. Jarius risked his reputation and probably his lively hood by seeking help from Jesus, but Jarius no longer cared for himself. His

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concern was for his daughter who was dying. If it meant prostrating himself before Jesus to get help, he didn't care what anyone else thought. All that mattered was his little girl.

The woman with the bleeding disorder was also desperate. After 12 years of bleeding, she was on the verge of dying, and after 12 years of loneliness she was about ready to snap emotionally. It was illegal for her to be out in public, brushing against other people in the crowd. It was illegal to touch the clothes of a man, any man let alone a holy man. But, she felt it was now or never; she would touch Him and receive help or she would resign herself to a lonely death. Jarius and the bleeding woman were united in their desperation and in their resolve; they were willing to do whatever it took to bring their need to Jesus.

Thirdly, Jarius and the unnamed woman are united in their faith. The stories of Jesus' miracles had reached their ears and brought hope to their souls. Mark 5:22-23 say, "Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." Jarius had faith in the hands of Jesus. In the desperation of his need, Jarius believed there was help and healing in the hands of Jesus.

The woman also believed. Speaking of her, Mark 5:27-28 say, "When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." In the desperation of her need, the woman believed there was help and healing even in the clothes of Jesus.

The questions are unavoidable: What do I believe about Jesus? What do you believe about Jesus? Do we believe there is healing in His hands and in His cloak? Do we believe there is healing and forgiveness in His blood? Do we believe that if we just get close enough to Jesus He will make us whole? Jarius believed this and so did the woman in our story; they believed and were not disappointed. Jarius and the woman who bled, they were different in many ways, but in the depth of their need, in their willingness to do whatever it required to have their need met, and in their belief in Jesus they were united and they were the same.

There is yet another comparison I would have us make this morning. There is a contrast between Jesus in the crowd and His one on one relationship with those He healed. There is a lot of emotion and excitement in the crowd that surrounds Jesus in our Scripture this morning. When the woman touched Jesus' cloak and was healed of her

bleeding, Mark 5:30 says, "At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

According to Mark 5:31, His disciples thought His question absurd: "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" Mark 5:32-34 say, "But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it." Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Something God has been speaking to me about over the past several weeks is that individual ministry is more important than the crowd. To put it another way, it doesn't matter how many people may be packed into a church on Sunday morning, if no one meets Jesus it amounts to nothing. We've been noticing in our series of messages from Mark that wherever Jesus shows up to teach, He always draws a crowd, but the focus isn't on the crowd; the focus is on the individual people who are touched and transformed and made whole by Jesus. It's in the intimacy of people's one on one relationship with Him that the kingdom of God is revealed. Jesus wasn't interested in the crowd; His focus was on that one person who had the faith to touch Him. And, it was for that person Jesus searched. This was the person Jesus wanted to meet. Jesus wanted the woman to know that she had not stolen her healing. He wanted her to see into His eyes and know that her healing was freely given and that He was pleased with her faith. "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

We see the contrast between the person and the crowd with Jarius too. Look again at Mark 5:35-42: "While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?" Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and

walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.

The excited jostling crowd was all around Him, but Jesus ministered one on one with the woman who had been healed. The crowd was pressing in on them when the news came that Jarius' daughter had died, but Jesus made eye contact with Jarius, "Don't be afraid; just believe," He said.

Jesus goes with Jarius but He disperses the exuberant crowd. At Jarius' home Jesus finds another mob of people; they have come to help the bereaved parents grieve, but Jesus dismisses the crowd. Jesus takes His three closest disciples and the little girls parents into her bedroom. Healing isn't given in the crowd but in the intimacy of that bedroom. "Little lamb, rise up and live." The kingdom of God is not represented in the crowd; rather, the kingdom of God is experienced whenever anyone comes into an intimate, one on one relationship with Jesus Christ.

It occurs to me that there may be someone who came into this church this morning with a great sense of need and you are saying to yourself right now, "if I could just touch the edge of His garment, I know I will receive the help I need." That's what this service is all about. It's not about the crowd, not about how many are here or how many are off somewhere else. It's about the Lord's desire to find that one or two desperate people who are not going to leave this place this morning until they have touched the hem of His garment.

Is there anyone desperate for the Lord this morning? I invite you to come and meet Jesus. If you believe, this wooden altar rail can become for you the hem of His garment. If you believe, just touching it with faith in Him, may allow the kingdom of God to flow into your need. It's not about the crowd; it's all about you seeking for Jesus and Jesus searching for you. If you are desperate for the Lord and willing to take the desperate measure of letting your need be seen, I believe He will touch you and make you whole.

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Mark 5:21-43

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