

“Where Does It Hurt?”

Valley Presbyterian Church – August 13, 2023

Rev. Dr. John Wahl

Mark 5:21-43

Our passage today begins with the healing story of the young daughter of a synagogue leader named Jairus, interrupts that narrative with another healing story of a woman with hemorrhages for twelve years, and then concludes with the raising of the first young girl; even though she had died waiting for the delayed Jesus to arrive.

This sandwiching of stories is a marker of Mark's writing style. Here, we are given the stories of two women – a young girl and a persistent woman – one sandwiched within the other; presented so that they might interpret each other and reveal something more about Jesus and his healing power. This Jesus can heal illness even when he doesn't initiate it and can raise someone he failed to heal in time; the two stories sandwiched because some things taste better together.

“Where does it hurt?” These stories offer but two examples of the many ways that we all experience and encounter traumatic pain and suffering. Some can be sudden or surprising while others are chronic and systemic. Often, these hurts seem to pile one on top the other; creating the weight of confusion, sadness, and fatigue.

Jesus' path to the house of Jairus gets interrupted by a crowd. More specifically, an unnamed woman approached Jesus secretly – unlike the named religious leader – because, in the socio-religious dynamics of the day, she would not have been a welcomed interruption. Mark, it appears, wanted his readers to interpret these two healing accounts in light of each other.

The author goes to great lengths to describe the woman in a long sentence full of past participles: having suffered, having spent lots of money, having not benefitted, and having gotten worse; having heard about Jesus, and having come up from behind him...then, finally, comes the long-delayed main verb: she *touched* his garment. Despite all that she has endured, over twelve long years, she still possesses agency: to touch the hem of the one she knows can heal her. Hers is no

passive rescue; the confirmation of healing comes not from without, but within – the woman knows immediately that her health has been restored.¹

And just as the woman understood the changes in her body, so Jesus recognized a change in his own body, asking, “Who touched my clothes?” It is reminiscent of the scene described in Genesis after Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit and are hiding from God. God strolls through the garden and calls out, “where are you?” It’s not that God is unaware of their location. Rather, the question offers an opportunity for Adam and Eve to come forward and come clean.

In this story, the woman, we are told, “knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before (Jesus) and told him the whole truth.” (v. 33) What does it mean for this woman to tell her *whole truth*? Is she confessing something about her plan, or sharing her confidence in Jesus? Does she say something like: *I was desperate, and you were my last hope?*²

The narrative returns to the journey to Jairus’ house. The delay – healing the unnamed woman – led to the report from Jairus’ household that his daughter had already died; Jesus was too late. But, Jesus’ reaction to this sad news is reminiscent of what enslaved African-Americans of the 19th century sang: *God may not come when you call him, but he’ll be there right on time.*³ Jesus encourages Jairus to hold on to the faith that led him to find Jesus in the first place. Despite the way circumstances looked, God was present in the pain.

Rev. Brittany Fiscus-van Rossum serves as pastor of Mercy Community Church, an ecumenical congregation that meets in borrowed spaces, parking lots, and on the streets of Atlanta, Georgia – ministering to the homeless and housing insecure. In this clip, she talks about the challenges – and the power – related to this question, “Where Does It Hurt?”

Have you ever not wanted to ask this question because you don’t know if you can accept the answer? As a pastor to a community of many people who are experiencing homelessness, there are some days that I struggle to find the right compassionate words.

There are days when I don’t necessarily want to ask the question, “How was your night last night?” because I’m afraid of what the response might be. I’m afraid because maybe they’ll say it was too cold or too rainy, or maybe the police

¹ David Schnasa Jacobsen from *WorkingPreacher.com*

² Mark Vitalis Hoffman

³ As quoted by Emerson Powery

told them to move, or maybe they experienced violence, and I won't have a solution or an answer. Maybe I won't know what to do. Or maybe even their answer is going to call attention to the injustice happening in my own city, and I'm going to have to acknowledge that I am complicit in some of the things, in some of the broken systems that cause other people pain.

Even as I was asked to reflect on this question, I found myself wanting to jump to the next question like, "Where does it hurt" Okay, "What can I do?" "How can I fix it?" "How can I be a helper?" And, you know, I think that's natural, because I think that as faithful people, as people called to be present to one another, as people called to follow an embodied and enfleshed God who was present to human beings and right in the middle of humanity and all of its pain and all of its suffering, I think we, too, are called not to move too quickly to what's next.

We are called to ask, "Where does it hurt?" To be present to whatever the answer might be. We are called to value the human being, the stories, the experiences, the pain of others. Even if it's different from our own. Even if it calls us to account. If we are to be people who bring peace and healing, it's going to happen through listening. It's going to happen through relationships. It's going to happen through being present to one another, bearing witness to pain because that's who our God is. Our God bears witness to our pain. Our God stands alongside us in all of our pain and suffering, and we're called to do that for one another.

When I went through my separation and divorce, I experienced a whole range of hurt: confusion and anger, estrangement and sadness. The pain seemed, at the same time, to be both sudden and never-ending. Amid this traumatic event, I felt the support of family, friends, and this congregation, but I leaned especially on two colleagues who gifted me their unconditional care and support – as often and for as long as I needed it. I also joined a divorce support group that met in another local congregation to help process the many different emotions I was experiencing.

I came to understand, in those days, that – through these various supports – our enfleshed God was present with me in the pain. Like the two women in Mark's sandwiched story, Jesus was not content to leave me in a place of hurting and had the power to bring about healing, even if not the kind of healing that I could have imagined at the time.

“Where does it hurt? This question is essential if we – as God’s people – desire to care for and help lead each other to healing. Sometimes, it is not a question that we want to ask; it can be painful to listen to the answers that this question evokes, knowing that we might not have an answer; that we may not be able to fix every problem. Sometimes, as we just heard, we must put ourselves in the uncomfortable places where human beings live, breathe and hurt – because those are the places we will also find Jesus.

And so, friends, I’ve been meaning to ask, “Where does it hurt?” Even though your story might seem like a crowd pressing in, may be like an unwanted interruption, as if your painful experiences will only pile onto the weight of confusion, sadness, or fatigue, we need to share with one another, listen intently to each other, and trust that Jesus will be found in the midst of these uncomfortable places where all of us live - where Jesus has the power to bring healing. Amen.