

Mark 5:21-43

“A Markan Sandwich”

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Friends, lets pray:

Most faithful God, you show us again and again that you are never too busy to hear us, to respond to us, and to offer your healing touch. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Friends, today we come to a unique scripture in Mark; it is a story within a story, an act of healing encased within yet another act of healing. This layering of stories occurs more than once in Mark and in fact many theologians refer to our scripture as a typical “Markan Sandwich”. One theologian comment:

The flavor of the outer story adds zest to the inner one; the taste of the inner one is meant in turn to permeate the outer one. Both stories are about fear and faith, and the power of Jesus to take people from one to the other. Both, singly and together, are worth spending time ‘inside’, in the sense of meditating on them, imagining you are in the crowd watching it all happen, then — if you dare! — identifying with the various characters at the center of the drama. That’s a wonderful way to turn scripture into prayer — and today, as in Jesus’ day, to turn fear into faith.
– N.T. Wright

In Mark, Jesus performs a series of divine interventions crossing back and forth across the sea of Galilee. He just stepping out of his boat after casting daemons out of the possessed Gerasene demoniac. Immediately Jesus finds himself surrounded by a great crowd and the esteemed leader of a Jewish synagogue, Jairus, who fell at his feet begging Jesus to “lay hands” upon his daughter.

This is a dramatic scene- played out in public- a wealthy civic and religious leader openly decrying Jesus Kingship in both an act of kneeling and begging for a "laying on of hands" which in Jewish tradition was reserved for sacrifice, blessing, and ordination. No doubt his faith in

Jesus divine abilities outweighed any potential institutional or political backlash for Jairus. Jairus was desperate; more than anything he desired for his daughter to live.

It says Jairus's daughter was a twelve-year-old Jewish girl who was "little and dying unto death". She would have been from a prominent citizen, known financial security and have access to great resources. "Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." Exhorted Jairus. So, Jesus went with him.

And along the way a great crowd pressed in on him and his cloak was touched by a single woman. And Jesus stops in his tracks. Jairus, must have been overcome by fear for time was of the essence- but Jesus made Jairus and his daughter- wait. This powerful and important leader's urgent timetable is at the mercy of a timeless and ever- compassionate God.

"Who touched my clothes?" asked Jesus. A woman, came before him "in fear and trembling" fell down at his feet and told him the whole truth. Twelve years, twelve years she had suffered by an unstoppable flow of blood. For twelve years she had spent all she had enduring what would have been horrible treatments, spending everything, spending all she had, trying to cling to her precious life literally flowing out of her, and still her condition grew worse. Impoverished. Diminished. Without hope.

Her words in Greek can also be translated "If I can just touch his clothes,' she said to herself, 'I'll be rescued.'

You know, one great title for this text might be "Jesus the Divine multitasker". In our world this story in a story is almost expected; we live fast paced overlapping lives where everything, everywhere, all at once is even a movie title! In the first century, this probably would have seemed alarmingly odd, frenetic, unbelievably fast paced, and even confusing with its urgency to have so much happening at once. But one thing is sure; Jesus' ability to see, meet, hear, and respond to two very different petitioners is a clear statement of God's ability to individually respond to us, to meet us in our prayers in this complicated overlapping world. Our still speaking God is never overwhelmed by the complexity or incongruent requests that come God's way.

Do we ever neglect a conversation with God because we have no time, for we move from one thing to the next, to overwhelmed to reach out and touch the hope filled cloak of the Living Christ?

You know we modern people are bombarded with communications that require us to constantly put them through a “truth” filter. It’s no wonder that we find ourselves cynical and distrustful of many methods of communication. Take the “feedback sandwich” which I myself have used and been encouraged to use. Consider these thoughts from an HR professional:

We’ve all heard the advice: Start with positive feedback, deliver negative feedback and close with something positive again. And just like that, in three easy steps, you can deliver all the negative feedback you want without upsetting your teams. Right? It’s bad advice—and can do a lot of damage to the relationship.

The main issue with the sandwich approach is that it’s actually manipulation. In brief, you’re manipulating someone by distracting them from the main point—your constructive criticism. Most leaders do something even worse: They deliver positive feedback that’s not really genuine. This undermines trust and shows your team member that you’re willing to deliver phony feedback to manipulate their feelings.

– Forbes *Why the Sandwich Approach to Criticism is Terrible Advice*. April 26, 2022

I wonder how we approach the stories in the bible: are our “truth” filters set such that we arrive at these texts cynically, anticipating being manipulated, looking for scientific untruth?

Do our recalcitrant hearts find Jesus words or actions phony distractions missing the life changing hope of the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Well Jesus goes on to say to the woman: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” And immediately she felt her body healed. And at the same time people came from Jairus’s house and address only Jairus saying “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher- Jesus- any further?”. These people take no notice, nor take the time to understand, the miracle that had just taken place.

So, Jesus then proceeds to Jairus home, where the crowds laugh at his statement that “the little girl is only asleep”. And here is where it becomes real, personal, where the nature of God’s pure intentions is laid bare: Jesus chooses casts out all the cynical, all the rational people. He throws them out behind closed doors. Only a few of his disciples, his weird crazy disciples, and the traumatized grief-stricken parents of the little girl, are left in the room. This healing, this raising, this miracle bore through forced waiting, was meant to be private. The giving of life, was not an exhibition, it was not a show for the crowds but an intimate, tender, sweet act of Resurrection. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!”

And the twelve-year-old girl did just this: she stood up, she stood up, and like any health twelve-year-old was hungry, and needed a bite to eat.

God’s healing is not meant to be an exposition of power to sway public opinion; it is meant to remain solely focused upon those that suffer, those that grieve, those that hurt, and are hopeless. God’s healing means being patient and yielding to a timeline that is illogical. God’s healing calls us to trust in the impossible. God’s healing is an every-unfolding story encased within a thousand other miraculous stories which we cannot see or recognize, but rather we laugh off, dismiss, or cannot see. Yet through faith, behind doors that at times are meant for us and at times not, the Lamb of God continues to tend, to shepherd, to nurture, to give life to his flock.

One theologian says this about God’s presence-

To ears which have been trained to wait upon God in silence, and in the quietness of meditation and prayer, a very small incident, or a word, may prove to be a turning point in our lives, and a new opening for God’s love to enter our world, to create and to redeem. – Olive Wyon.

I wonder, where is that small opening in your world that can pull you into the company of those praising The One who creates, sustains, and redeems all life- everywhere?

This all reminds me of my favorite sandwich story. One of the great gifts of having access to a cabin is how time seems to stand still in that place. Pictures, objects, furniture, smells- it’s pretty much just like it always has been. So, through our senses there are all these connections that aid our neurology into rather remarkable levels of remembering. You know, that feeling you get when something that happened ten years ago floods back like it was yesterday?

Well, a couple years back I was out grouse hunting one morning. I was walking along a beautiful trail I have walked since I was about 14. I even had the same hunting vest from high school which I left there, the last semester of college- around 2003.

As I walked there was a rhythmic “thump, thump” against my right side. Eventually I stopped and placed my hand against my vest and realized- there was something in it! So, I unzipped the pocket to find some shells, an old deer tag, and then a Ziplock bag. As I pulled the Ziplock bag, what I saw was a perfectly square, brownish green blue goop of unknown origin and unrecognizable elasticity. I began to palpate it but found it was absolutely consistent- a unified substance which just baffled me even more.

Well, it took me awhile and then it hit me: at one time this was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Still my favorite snack to pack and apparently leave in a hunting vest for approximately fifteen years.

Why am I telling you this? Because, over time, the sandwich became- something entirely new; unrecognizable. But it served as a startling accurate reminder of the day I made that sandwich. It was a hot October fall when my oldest brother Peter and I took our four German shorthaired pointers and hunted a particular ridge in the Chequamegon national forest for grouse. I remembered taking the sandwich out. Leaning against a tall red pine, and having a single bite before sealing it tight again. It was a wonderful memory of time with one of my loved ones. A memory that I would have long forgotten without this “gooey” reminder. I laughed.

Yet in that moment, I pondered how that memory had become infused with years of maturity, a lifetime unfolding before me; layered with the challenges of becoming a husband and father; permeated with faithfulness through reading and living out scripture’s truths. I looked upon that memory very differently than when I was younger and fresher.

At first, I felt complex sorrow for all the broken relationships that have piled on over the years- all the missteps of my life. Grief for loved ones who have passed into eternity. The heavy weight of a complex world that will not slow down on my command. But then waves of gratitude washed over me to have had that time with my brother. I sensed a reverence for God’s timelessness welling up in my heart in the beauty of creation. I pondered how privileged I was to be in such a beautiful place, with a back and legs that allowed me to move, and to have had the companionship of gorgeous dogs long since passed- and the dog now at my side.

In that private moment, fear gave way to faith, and thankfulness rained down like the golden Aspen leaves making their earthly journey. That moment was like a timeless Markan sandwich; meant to be received as whole, with laughter and with tears.

I ask you, today, what does it mean to receive God's healing?

How do we, in a scientific age where some claim that miracles never take place, have eyes to see and ears to hear and faith to behold- the great miracles of healing that take place around us- everyday?

I cannot answer the questions for you: that work is yours and the joy of this work is between you and your maker. But I do know that your story is a story within a story, within a story, within- a miracle. You are surrounded by such a great cloud of witness for the Holy is in the spectacular and mundane, found in private, bestowed as an act of Grace in quietness. And only by the Grace of our God almighty who would be so bold, so faithful as to offer God's only son, is fear transformed into faith. For you are at the center of the drama, and this scripture becomes our prayer, our turning point, words to create and to redeem.

"Do not fear" says Jesus the Christ whose attention is always upon his father's precious creation. And in the quiet, he lovingly gazes down upon all of us saying, "Talitha Cum", inviting us to rise and have a bite to eat.

Amen.