

King's Cross, 5 The Waiting

Mark 5: 21 – 43

There's been a very select group of people I've come across throughout my life – authors, a couple of preachers – people who, in my opinion, have a special gift to be able to look at Scripture passages that we've heard again and again, passages that I thought we'd wrung dry as far as inspiration and teaching content, and see something that everyone else has missed. So I've truly, and deeply appreciated writers over the course of my Christian development like C. S. Lewis, Philip Yancey, Brennan Manning, Adam Hamilton, Dallas Willard, and more recently, Timothy Keller – all people who love the church, love Scripture, love the Lord, and who have been constant sources of fresh wind of the Spirit for my personal life and spiritual growth. And indirectly, you have them all to thank too, as you've heard so many of their ideas 'second-hand' through my sermons!

A great example of the kind of fresh insight that I'm talking about is what we find in Tim Keller's book, King's Cross, which is the basis for our summer preaching series. This week's chapter is chapter 6, titled *The Waiting*. I've read a lot of books on Biblical interpretation, I've heard a lot of sermons (and preached even more) but I never heard anyone lift up the topic of *patience* based on this passage in Mark 5, until I read Keller's thoughts. But, this immediately resonated with me – what a wonderful ability he has to put us 'into the moment', to help us 'be there' on that road with all these various characters!

** Moving from the perspective of Jairus, a well known, most likely, wealthy leader in the local synagogue; to this poor woman who had suffered with a serious medical condition for 12 years, getting worse and worse, then to Jesus, and back to Jairus, Keller beautifully captures the high tension and the charged atmosphere of this slice of life in the story of Jesus. And he lifts

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up an underlying theme that was a revelation to me – *patience*. Specifically, as the chapter title suggests, *waiting on God*. Waiting for *God's* timing in times of trouble and stress.

Had you seen this in the text before this?

The story opens with Jairus – a man of high position, a leader in the Synagogue - humbly coming before Jesus (who is surrounded once again by a large crowd of people), *falling at his feet* in front of all these people, begging, and asking him to please, please, come to his house.

** *“My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.”*

Any parent knows that our pride, all decorum fall aside when it comes to the safety and well being of our children! Any 'normal' parent would do *anything they can* for the safety of our kids. As Keller points out, the wording of this request indicates Jairus' desperation: “*My daughter is as good as dead...please help! I need you. And I need you NOW! This is urgent.*

Can you imagine his relief when Jesus agreed to go with him? I can feel it myself – because now, see, where there had been just a very slim hope (he had to first *find* Jesus, get him to grant an audience with him, then convince him to come home with him, then... what would/ could he do? *Something, who knows?*) But now, it's starting to happen, here's Jesus, the great miracle worker, coming to his house! It's all coming together; the plan is working. There's now a flicker of hope!

** But something happens on the way to Jairus' house... so, let's read it –

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard

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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."

** Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

Jesus uses an interesting word here for 'power' - its the first time it's used in Mark. The Greek **word is *dunamis*, which, if you change the 'u' to a 'y' we get the English word 'dynamite'. It's a common word elsewhere in the NT to describe the *power* of the Holy Spirit. Now, before you ask me about this, I have to tell you - I have *no explanation* for how it could be that 'power' could 'go out from Jesus without him knowing anything about it. That's above my pay grade, you know what I mean?

We're told that Jesus knew what people were *thinking* on numerous occasions, he 'saw' Nathaniel under the fig tree from far off, all that... so why was he surprised (and even confused) by this woman's act? "Who touched me?" - that's a mystery, (and I also noticed that Keller doesn't even attempt to tackle this.) But these 'inconsistencies' to me, you know, the things that don't fit neatly into our theological 'boxes', to me, give the text a ring of truth - if this was something that people just made up, they wouldn't leave such 'gaps'. You know, they would explain it. But it's here, because this is what happened - just another reminder that there's an awful lot about God that we don't (can't) understand! [I know that we can look at this like Jesus is 'the' parent, who stands in the kitchen asking, "Ok, who made this mess?" And there's only one child at home. "Come on...who did this?" waiting for the confession, and it may be as simple as that, but the text really doesn't lend itself to that conclusion.]

** But, anyway, here's this woman who had been suffering with a physical condition for 12 years. Add to the suffering that she has spent *everything she had* on treatments, so now, she's not only sick, but she's poor. Add to that the fact that bleeding, for a Jew, had more than just physical consequences, as this made her ceremonially unclean. So, she had been excluded from worship - the center of her community and her people - for 12 years. A huge price to pay.

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So, here's another person who, like Jairus, has reached the desperation point. She then, acts completely out of character for herself, and her culture, breaking taboos, and, pushing through the crowd, she touches Jesus' robe, because she was convinced that doing this would bring her healing.

At this point, Jesus stops walking, whirls around and asks, "Who touched me?" ("I sensed power going out from me", we read in Luke's Gospel) And, of course, the disciples were like, "What do you mean? Look at the crowd of people here pressing against you. How can you ask 'who touched me'?"

We are such 'bottom line' people that we read this story, and we see the action, but we don't typically consider the time passing. But picture this - Jesus stops, asks his question... and he waits for a response. Who touched me? And we read,

** *"Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet, trembling with fear, and told him the whole truth."*

So, this woman, Mark says, *immediately* sensed that her touch 'worked' - she knew she was healed. And when he says 'she *came* and fell at his feet' implies that she had quickly moved away after touching his robe. But now, she's afraid that she has done something wrong, afraid that she would be humiliated, chastised, something like that ... but Jesus had something *else* in mind.

Keller suggests that this woman had a sort of superstitious understanding of Jesus' power, I would add, just like many people do today. A superstition based 'faith' involves things like bargaining (Oh, God, if you do *this* for me, then I'll do *this* for you), and some recipes - 'If you want God to act on your behalf, here's what *you need to do*', follow these directions, and do it *exactly like this*.

Whenever I anoint someone with oil for healing, I try to remember to remind them that 'this is not magic' - it's not like if we just say certain words, and do certain actions, then God has been 'bound', God now *has* to do our bidding. It's never like that.

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As Keller says, that is superstitious faith; that kind of 'faith' is based on the erroneous belief that God's power is *manageable*. Thinking that we can control it, we can dictate how it will be used... so Jesus asks her (requires her) come forward and identify herself so that they can *meet*, and he can tell her - my daughter, it wasn't the *touch* that healed you, it was your faith - *in me* - that made this happen. So Jesus says,

** *Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.*

Jesus is telling her that that her faith has opened the door to a life-transforming relationship with him. And as Keller writes, "There's all the difference in the world between a superstitious person who gets a bodily healing, and a life-transformed follower of Jesus for all eternity."

When we come to Jesus, we don't come to manage him - to tell him what he needs to do for us, - we come to allow *him* to 'manage *us*', and the result (as we'll see again when we get back to ** Jairus) is that he always asks more from us and gives more to us than we are ever expecting. He's not manageable, or, as we read about the great lion, Aslan, in The Chronicles of Narnia, "...he is not a *tame lion!*"

This woman wanted to be healed, she was just tired of suffering... and she got that. But she got more than that, too - her life from this moment on, was going to be centered around the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ - the one she had 'met' through her faith. And He would ask more of her in days to come, but he would *give her* even more as well.

We see that same point being made, maybe even *more* powerfully, as we 'draw the camera back' from this personal conversation in the midst of a crowd of people, to see what else is going on. Remember that while Jesus was speaking with this woman, while he was waiting for her to gather up her courage and identify herself, while he was patiently listening to her explain herself, we have poor, desperate, Jairus now 'put on hold'.

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In a sense, just like this woman, remember, he had a timetable for Jesus, too. And *his* timetable, from our perspective, was perfectly understandable. Listen to how Keller puts this:

** "Imagine Jairus' anxiety during all of this; the disciple's irritation; Jesus' patience and composure. This woman with a chronic condition getting attention instead of the little girl who has an acute condition. Jesus chooses to stop and talk with the woman who has just been healed. This makes no sense. It is absolutely irrational. In fact, it's worse than that: It's malpractice. If these two were in the same emergency room, any doctor who treated the woman first and let the little girl die would be sued. And Jesus is behaving like such a reckless doctor."¹

But that's what Jesus does, and as he's standing there talking to the woman, the very thing that Jairus feared happened:

** *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 anymore?"*

Again, remember that earlier statement: we don't come to Jesus to *manage him*. We come to *be managed*. And Jairus was about to discover that, as well as the other lesson that the woman learned - Jesus always asks more from us and gives more to us than we would ever expect.

So here's Jairus reeling from this terrible news, but Jesus ignores the messengers, looks right at him and says,

** *"Don't be afraid, just believe"*

In a way very similar to the way he spoke to the disciples in the boat after the calming of the storm (a passage that we looked at last week), here is Jesus again telling someone that their interpretation of the circumstances of their lives is missing some crucial information. It is lacking God's perspective.

Keller puts it like this:

** *When Jesus looks at Jairus and says "Trust me, be patient," in effect he is looking over Jairus' head at all of us and saying, "Remember how when I calmed the storm I showed you that my grace and love are compatible with going through storms, though you may not think*

¹ King's Cross, p. 60, ePub edition

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so? Well, now I'm telling you that my grace and love are compatible with what seems to you to be unconscionable delays." It's not, "I will not be hurried even though I love you"; it's "I will not be hurried because I love you.

*** I know what I'm doing. And if you try to impose your understanding of schedule and timing on me, you will struggle to feel loved by me. Jesus will not be hurried, and as a result, we often feel exactly like Jairus, impatient because he's delaying irrationally, unconscionably, inordinately².*

You see, it was actually *because* of Jesus' delay that both the woman and Jairus ended up getting far more than they asked for. The woman was not only healed, but she had begun an eternal relationship with her Creator. Now, let's look at Jairus. Even though they all know now that the little girl had died, Jesus says to him, "I'm coming to your house anyway." Let's read it:

*** 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 leader, 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 began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.

Astonished is an understatement, don't you think? Jairus wanted to bring Jesus to his house so he could cure a fever, not perform a resurrection! Again, "when you go to Jesus for help, you get from him far more than you had in mind!" But remember the other part of that statement?

When you go to Jesus for help, you also end up *giving him* far more than you expected to. Jairus had a plan - go find Jesus, talk him into coming home with him, and hopefully get him there before his little girl died. But after his daughter died (due to the 'malpractice' - the delay - of the Great Physician), Jesus looks him right in the eye and says, "Trust me." Under those circumstances, that's asking a lot, isn't it?

Now, of course, when we read the story to the end, we know something that Jairus and the disciples didn't know: we know that to Jesus, curing a fever, or raising someone from the dead

² King's Cross, p. 61, ePub edition

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was no different. Jesus has power over death. Jesus can take a superstitious woman who has a healing and turn her into a life long disciple. The people with Jesus *in that moment* had no clue about either ability. No idea at all!

Here's Keller once again:

** "It seemed to Jairus and the disciples that Jesus was delaying for no good reason, but they didn't have all the facts. And so often, if God seems to be unconscionably delaying his grace and committing malpractice in our life, it's because there is some crucial information that we don't yet have, some essential variable that's unavailable to us. If I could sit down with you and listen to the story of your life, it may well be that I would join you in saying, "I can't understand why God isn't coming through. I don't know why he is delaying."

** Believe me, I know how you feel, so I want to be sensitive the way I put this. But when I look at the delays of God in my own life, I realize that a great deal of my consternation has been rooted in arrogance. I complain to Jesus, "Okay, you're the eternal Son of God, you've lived for all eternity, you created the universe. But why would you know any better than I do how my life should be going?"

** (Blank) So, the question remains for us all - is God delaying something in your life? Do you find yourself ready to give up because something hasn't happened *in the way you have planned*, or *the way you've expected it to?* Or, the way you are demanding it to happen? Maybe there is some crucial factor that you just don't (or, can't) have access to? What then do we do? The answer, as it was for Jairus, as it was for those disciples in the boat during the storm... is to trust Jesus.

But, why should we?

** Look again with me at the description of Jesus in that little girl's room...

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 began to walk around (she was twelve years old).

Look at the details here... Jesus isn't doing a 'ritual' to make some kind of point. He's not teaching, or expounding theology... He takes this girl *by the hand*, and he says to her "Talitha koum!" Talitha is an Aramaic word, a diminutive, and literally, it means 'little girl'... but culturally, it would have been the way that a parent would refer to their own child. "Koum"

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doesn't mean 'rise from the dead', it means 'get up', as in 'awaken'! I love Keller's paraphrase:
"Honey, it's time to get up!"

And we see here how the One who holds power over death treats his children. With gentleness, with compassion, with love... and with power. Keller points out that this same God treats all of us the same way. In our time of need, at the right time...

** The Lord of the Universe, the One who danced the stars into place, takes you by the hand and says, "Honey, it's time to get up."

These are the actions of One we can trust - ultimately. When we understand what is happening in our lives, we can trust him. But also in those dark times, in the times when we can't see what's ahead, in those times when we are *sure* in the context of our limited human understanding that God should be doing it *our way*, but he *doesn't*... we can remember, (picture that scene)... we can remember the love, the grace, the gentleness, and know that this love and compassion will never end, because he is unchanging...

'Honey... my dear child, it's time to get up'!