

Mark 5:21-43^{New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)}

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat^[a] to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²²Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³and begged him repeatedly, "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." ²⁴So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." ²⁹Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³²He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" ³⁶But overhearing^[b] what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰And they laughed at him. Then 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. ⁴¹He

took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

2 Corinthians 8:7-15 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

⁷Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you^[a]—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.^[b]

⁸I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. ⁹For you know the generous act^[c] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ¹⁰And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— ¹¹now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.¹²For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. ¹³I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵As it is written,

“The one who had much did not have too much,
and the one who had little did not have too little.”

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“Along with the Crowd, Alone in the Crowd”

The crowd gathered around him. The crowd followed him. The crowd closed in on him. The crowd worshiped him. The crowd judged him. The people in those crowds probably had wildly different opinions about who he was. He was a teacher and a rabble-rouser, a prophet and a threat, a mystic and a crazy man, a healer and a charlatan, a carpenter’s son and a curiosity. But who the mob thought he was could change with a mere shift in emotion - with loud cries of “Hosanna” one day to shouting “crucify him!” the next.

Mark uses “the crowd” as a character in his stories about Jesus. They were a force to be reckoned with, and always seemed to be gathered around except in those times when Jesus had had enough and shooed them away. I’ve often wondered how Jesus experienced “the crowd.” In today’s religious venues, having a crowd is thought of as a good thing. Preachers who fill stadiums are the ones who’ve really made it. The Joel Osteens and Joyce Meyers with book contracts, and seats on the talk show circuit are sometimes the envy of lesser known pastors who long for mightier pulpits and even a fraction of the admiration that those icons seem to experience. Did Jesus like the attention? Could he work his audience into the kind of like-minded frenzy that some of these stage show preachers can do so well?

Perhaps it should be of some interest to us that, rather than try to brag about the numbers of the converted, or the revenue generated from large donations, or the popularity that they were all experiencing as part of Jesus' inner circle, instead Mark tells us about how Jesus is far more interested in two unique individuals who stand alone and apart from this crowd. Maybe Mark thought it was unusual too. Maybe his disciples and close confidants were just as surprised as we are that Jesus ignored his entourage in order to pay attention to this leader of the synagogue who was troubled with a sick daughter and to heal the woman with the hemorrhage just because she reached out to touch him.

You see, crowds can get worked up about any number of things. Crowds can gather to march arm in arm after the tragic murders in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, or they can gather a mob to burn black churches in its wake. They can celebrate the Supreme Court decision for all couples who love each other to get married without discrimination, or they can just as easily picket that decision with signs that say "God hates fags." Sometimes we think we know which crowd is the right one to belong to. Sometimes it seems so glaringly obvious. But more often it's not. Can improving our race relations really hinge on removing a symbol like the confederate flag? Is marriage a much larger and more nuanced conversation than what the legal system grants as permissible? Being part of the crowd is human. We are social creatures. We like knowing that people think like

us or feel like us. The media outlets prey on that knowledge hoping to secure their particular share of the market. Churches are known for doing the same – drawing us in to believe that we are on the right side, God’s side. For good or for ill – the crowd can be easily manipulated, drawn into doing greater things than an individual seems to be able to do on his or her own.

Jesus spoke to such crowds often, but I can’t find one single case in which he deliberately did what we would call “picking a side.” I say that because whenever he spoke to the crowds it was in parables or stories or sayings that defied choosing a particular interpretation as the one right one. Sure he talked a lot about love and a lot about justice. He called people to repentance and he asked them to decide for themselves, “You tell me - Who was a neighbor to the man wounded on the Jericho road?” He asked people to love their enemies and pray for the people persecuting them, but the most he ever gave them was a free lunch. So when I want to believe that I’m on the right side, Jesus makes me take the next step deeper. Have I really listened? Have I learned anything? Have I taken the log out of my own eye before I tell my Facebook friend all about the speck that’s been bothering me in his?

Sometimes I think it’s unfair of Jesus to not give us more “right thinking.” Paul wasn’t so wishy-washy. He’d come out and beat people over the head with his moral platitudes. The prophets condemned whole nations. Moses had a fairly clear set of rules, and if those weren’t enough – read Leviticus someday just for fun. Jesus doesn’t

give the crowds what they want. It's almost as though he's OK with our dysfunction. He doesn't try to correct it. He doesn't try to cover it up. He doesn't waste any time congratulating us for doing good and he doesn't berate us when we miss the point.

Instead he does something completely different. He narrows his attention. He gives his focus and his energy to one person at a time. He not only sees; he bears witness to the pain on Jairus' face. His daughter is dying. I can't imagine worse pain than seeing your child suffer. I'd rather be sick ten times over than watch my child hurting. The crowd can wait. They can be unhappy with him. You see that they are. The leaders who have been on watch at his house come out while Jesus is still speaking to tell Jairus not to trouble the teacher any further, his daughter is dead. In that society, a dead daughter didn't count for much. No healing would touch this. The time for troubling the traveling rabbi is over. Except for Jesus it isn't. He looks at these men of power and tells them, "Do not fear, only believe." He showed with his actions that a father's love is more important than the work of the synagogue. And there was probably much more than that going on. A healed daughter, true believers leading this particular synagogue – maybe that was more important than how many and how much.

The story sandwiched in between has a similar ring to it. A woman of great faith and even greater desperation reaches out to touch Jesus. If only she can reach the hem of his garment, maybe, just maybe she'll be made well. For 12 long years the

life had been draining out of her. For 12 long years she went to doctors and healers and tried every cure that anyone thought to recommend – but to no avail. He felt her touch. In a mysterious transfer of power – she became well. For Jesus, that was his teaching of the day. That was his message to the crowd. He didn't line up people to be healed for affect. He didn't say that someone in the television audience was going to be healed today. He felt her touch and she went home well.

Now, who's to say what the crowds went away with that day? You can't say what they marched for, or how they all felt, or what cause they promoted, or how many had been saved by Jesus. By Mark's account – two, two people were saved that day – a daughter and an unclean woman. That's not the kind of numbers we'd hope to see. Those aren't the 3,000 men, plus women and children that would be brag-worthy at some Billy Graham type crusade. But I dare say that the stories told about Jesus and his message are the ones that continue to be told and continue to inspire and continue to save lives.

It saves us to know that Jesus feels our hurt when our child needs stitches or suffers from the inner wounds of bullies. It saves us to know that Jesus is working hard at the free clinic to see that healing happens for the most vulnerable in our society. It saves us to know that love wins. Love wins even when murders happen in the name of hate. Love wins even when marriage equality is more a legal thought on paper than a practice for sustaining loving marriages from the threats of divorce and

domestic violence and fear of all varieties. Love wins even when we are at our most unlovable.

It's easier to be a part of the crowd than to allow ourselves to be truly healed and changed. Jairus and the woman showed a tremendous amount of courage and hope. Jesus responded to them – and met the most basic needs of their hearts. I have to believe that Jesus does the same for us. He turns and pays attention to each of us, apart from the crowd, especially when our authentic voices slip out. I'm not really moved by folks jumping on the bandwagon to remove the confederate flag. However, I am moved by Bree Newsome, who, Saturday morning climbed the flagpole near the South Carolina capitol and took the flag down while singing in her head, "The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?" She was arrested. She knew she probably would be. Is it still just a symbol, yes, but dare I say a more powerful one because of her bravery.

We are not let off the hook for our actions just because Jesus doesn't go with the flow of the crowd. In fact, we may be more fully "on" if we choose to follow where he is leading. It won't be easy or popular. It will risk all that we have, all that we are to go where he is going. The Bible study class at Emanuel AME risked welcoming the stranger. They could have been afraid and shut him out. But they were reading Jesus, in parables, in stories, in the lives of individuals.

The “in crowd” believes they are already saved and asks who’s in and who’s out. Jesus’ judgment doesn’t quite go that way. He sees the heart, my heart, your heart, every single heart in the crowd. He knows us for who we are and for who he earnestly wants us to become. We all have learning to do, from the least enlightened white supremacist, to the most enlightened kindest, gentlest person that you can think of today. It’s the human journey, and we’re all on it together.

I know I’m not quite over having my “part of the crowd” moments. Paul’s fire appeals to me to be honest. He calls the Corinthians to a greater generosity pretty heavy handedly. He won’t let them get by with their stingy behavior. Sometimes we need a little bit of Paul’s soul-stirring letter writing campaign to get us going. He led the charge at multiple churches and had the great compliment of being both loved and despised for his passion. But I find myself more pierced by Jesus’ gentleness and compassion than Paul’s rancor. Will I let him not just sway my mind, but enter my heart. Jairus did. The woman did. And likely many others who witnessed the events of that day were moved in places they never thought possible. I thank Mark for recording the intimate details of two lives, just two lives – saved by Jesus. Amen.