

Going the Second Mile (the Ministry of Interruptions!)

Mark 5: 21-43

We say Jesus is Lord, we say we are following Jesus, but are we? Would it not be more true to say that we decide what we feel we should do in His name and then expect Him to bless the work, and then wonder why he doesn't? Isaiah 55:8 reminds us that God's ways are not our ways, nor are his thoughts our thoughts: He doesn't rubber stamp our actions however well intended. So do we/will we really trust Him? Even when he interrupts our well-ordered schedule and cut across clearly defined work for Him? Would you or I be seemingly sidetracked when on a mercy mission for Him? Are you or I in contact with our commander Jesus at the throne of Grace 24/7?

So to these two accounts of healing which have more in common than maybe we have realised? 12 years of sickness, compared to a girl only 12 years old: the answer for both was to receive the life of Jesus into them

So as Peter tells his account of Jesus' life to Mark here he first tells us about Jarius' daughter. Here is a very prominent citizen, losing all his dignity, all his pride, all his prejudice, to come and kneel before a travelling preacher. You have to be pretty desperate to do that, and he was desperate. He had a girl of twelve, and this girl was on the threshold of womanhood because a girl in the Middle East became a woman at 12. She would be betrothed soon after, and married at 14 or 15. And so twelve was equivalent to our 18 or 21. Here is a young girl on the threshold of womanhood and marriage, with all the possibilities of life before her, and she is desperately ill. That would make a father do anything. This man, who normally sat on the high seat on the platform, came and knelt before Jesus publicly. He did not care - he wanted Jesus to come and help his daughter. This man had tremendous faith. He did not start with fear; he just started with sheer faith saying: "My little daughter is dying. Please come

and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.”
(V23) Then there was all this business about the woman who had been ill for twelve years. I can imagine his feelings: hurry, hurry, she’s been ill for 12 years, can’t she wait till tomorrow? 24 hours won’t make any difference. But Jesus calmly stops to talk. How would you feel if a child of yours were desperately ill and the doctor talked to his patients on the way to your house - and in what might seem a leisurely way? You would be getting all worked up inside.

Here before us is the ministry of interruptions: Jesus listening to His Father and confident that His Father knows best! Here is our call to a similar lifestyle: interruptions to my cosy life, well ordered schedule and demanding dairy. But who’s doing the interrupting? In this case the Father, whom Jesus trusted and obeyed, in our case our Lord whom we too say we trust and obey? So why did this woman come to Jesus? Because He was her last hope. The tragedy is that she had to try everybody else first. Isn’t it amazing that we often consider prayer as the last resort? After we have tried everything and everyone else, we say, ‘Well, there’s nothing for it but prayer.’ Why did she or indeed why do we not pray first? Mind you, of course, Jesus had not been healing in his ministry for all that period of twelve years. But here is a woman who regarded Jesus as her last hope. More than that, she regarded him as her best hope. The faith of the woman shines out even before she met him. She was not saying, ‘I’ll try Jesus as a last resort and see if he can help me.’ She was saying that she knew he could. She must have heard something about him; she must have heard that he helped others, and she was absolutely sure. Of course, her condition rendered her unclean for both religion and society, so she was not allowed to mix freely with others. So how could she get through to Jesus? Then she thought: I’ll wait until he’s in the middle of the crowd and I don’t care if I am unclean. I am going to push my way through. “If I

just touch his clothes, I will be healed." The Greek word used, is "tassel", which means that Jesus wore the robe of a devout Jew - a large square shawl with tassels at the four corners, mentioned in the Book of Numbers, and she believed that if she could just get through, near enough to Jesus to touch his tassel, that would be enough. Perhaps she was familiar with Malachi 4:2: But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings (tassels). What amazing determination to get through! So she came to him. The first two things we notice are these. She lost pain and he lost power. We note that they go together. Something was transferred from Jesus to her, and when Jesus heals we need to remember that something is being transferred: health, goodness and power. It was not that he gave her health in herself; he was giving her His Health. Here we come across a profound secret of the Christian Life that digs deep right to the heart of our new identity as Children of God. If I need patience I need His patience in me, not more of mine. He is my wisdom, he is my righteousness, he is my sanctification, and he is my life - if I get through to Him. I can get His for me. So she came, and she realised that if she got close enough to Him she could get from Him what she needed, and we need to realise this too. The other side of it is that instinctively, immediately, she felt one thing in her body - health, which had come into her body - but Jesus at the same time realised that something had gone out of His body. In other words, she was living on Jesus. That is the relationship that ought to be. I ought not to be trying to be kind like Jesus; I ought to be living on the kindness of Jesus. That is the secret of Christ-likeness - not to try and imitate Him but to feed on him. This is what is meant by the Vine and the branches in John 15: the branches draw everything from the vine. They do not produce fruit of themselves; they draw everything from the trunk, the stem and so must we. Jesus turned around and asked who had touched Him, and the disciples' response

showed that they thought this was a ridiculous question. He was in the middle of this crowd and said that! But Jesus repeated the question. Somebody had touched Him. Listen to me: You can be in a crowd very near to Jesus and yet not touch Him - I underline that. You can be sitting in church, part of a large congregation, and Jesus is there in the midst - he said he will be, and whether you are aware of it or not he is there. But you can be crowded near to him and yet go away without having touched Him in faith. Can I put it this way: what is the need that you bring into this worship service? What is your particular burden? What is the particular resource you are lacking and that you need? May I suggest that in the crowd, in the congregation, you stretch out the hand of faith, touch Jesus, and say, "If I can get through to Him I'll get what I need from Him; he's got enough for me." You can do that in a moment of quiet now, even as I am speaking. In the crowd, reach through and say. "By faith, Jesus. I take from you what I need." Why did Jesus want to know who had touched him? Because he was angry that he had lost something? Nothing of the sort. He wanted to get in touch with that person; he wanted to have a conversation; he wanted the truth to come out, and truth wants to come out, so he turned around and she came. She told him all the truth. That is the best thing you can ever do with Jesus: tell him all the truth; tell him about your condition; tell him what is wrong with you; tell him how you feel; tell him the whole truth. Then when she told him the truth he told her the truth. There was nothing magic about the tassel, there was nothing in those garments, nothing different, it was her faith in him that was the factor. Now, that applies to the sacrament of the Lords Supper. When we take bread and wine it is ordinary bread and ordinary wine, yet by faith we can have communion/fresh intimacy with Christ by taking it. There is nothing magical about the bread and the wine, it is our faith in Christ through the bread and the wine that makes this real to us

and makes it a sacrament. Similarly with baptism. It is ordinary water, which came from the water main and goes down the drain after. But what is it that makes baptism a means of grace and a meaningful thing to us? It is that through the water we reach Christ, we are buried with Christ; by faith we are touching him. Jesus wanted this woman to know there was nothing magic about his clothes, Daughter; your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering (v34). Her faith, her belief in Jesus is what matters. It was not touching the clothes that healed her; it was her faith that was determined to get through. So he told her the truth.

Having encountered the women through a divine interruption, Jesus goes on his way again to the house of Jarius. But at the house they come across mourners at the house, and it seems to be too late. At that point, the fear could have got in but the faith kept it out. We do not mourn in the country as they do in the Middle East. But Jesus told them to be quiet (just like he had done for the storm a bit earlier); their behaviour was inappropriate!

Then he said: "The child is not dead but asleep"(v39). Some have thought that he meant she was not physically dead, she was in a coma and they had mistaken the diagnosis. But it is interesting that Jesus preferred to talk of death as sleep. (e.g. Lazarus in John11). Why should Jesus say 'asleep'? The answer is that if someone is asleep they can be woken up. To Jesus, death was sleep because there was going to be a waking up. That's why many Christians put this phrase in their tombstones: Fallen asleep in Christ - because if someone has fallen asleep you expect them to wake up again. This is the Christian approach to death: this little girl is asleep; we can wake her up again. It means they are going to wake up again on resurrection 'morning'.

Putting people outside, taking three disciples (including Peter who is telling Mark) Jesus took the parents and went into the

bedroom. Then he said something so moving that we still have it in the original language and nobody has wanted to translate it: "Talitha, cumi!". Years later, the same Peter who was in that bedroom and heard those words, said it to a woman called Dorcas (Acts 9:40) and she woke up too. These words were burned deep into the memories of those three men: "Little Girl, I say to you, get up!" (V41), and she got up. Then with a divine touch of compassion. Jesus told them to get her something to eat. Why did he say that? Because she had been lying there without food for so long? I can think of another reason. Was it for her Mothers sake? Out of sheer consideration He was giving the Mother something to do; that was a profound touch of comfort and it is recorded in the Gospel. It shows again the sheer understanding of Jesus in such a situation. The mother now had to focus on getting something ready in the kitchen, getting something to eat, and she was gradually brought down to earth again. They were nearly out of their minds with amazement; putting the kettle on would just put that right.

These two stories of healing are two of four Mark wants us to grasp in his telling of the Good News that is Jesus: the stilling of the storm, then the healings of Legion, the woman and Jarius' daughter. The common denominator: every one of these four situations was beyond mans control. The storm cannot be controlled by human means, nor can demon possession, the woman had tried every doctor she could reach so she was beyond the help of men, as of course was the dead daughter of Jarius. These four stories are saying when you come to the very end of human resources you are just at the beginning of our Lord's. These four stories tell us this hidden meaning: we are not dealing with a great man in Jesus, we are dealing with God. We are not dealing with a great human being; great as he was, we are dealing with something in another category. What manner of man is this? He is God himself. That is why those who read the Gospel and then say,

'Jesus was just the greatest man who ever lived' have not really read the story, they have not seen the hidden meaning of the miracles: here is a person in complete control of every situation that was beyond the control of mankind, and that means he must be more than man. This is why I can tell you that it does not matter what situation you find yourself in, or however seemingly beyond help you are, "When other helpers fail and comforts flee, help of the helpless, O abide with me' - Jesus can and wants to help. Faith and fear are incompatible, but faith has got to be faith in something or someone. And if Jesus is God, and still alive, and still able to help, then I have a ground for my faith and therefore I have a ground for conquering my fear. Interruptions Lord? Yes please and don't let me miss them.

Pastor David
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