

The Wounds That Make Us Open to Grace

Mark 5:21-43

Last Sunday, our journey through the Gospel of Mark gave us a lesson about believing in God's grace when we feel powerless over some chaotic circumstance in life. Mark delivered that message through the story of Jesus calming a sudden storm that threatened to sink the boat that he and the disciples were using to cross the Sea of Galilee. Even though the details of that perilous journey were graphically presented in the story, most of never have—and with any luck, never will—be passengers on a sinking ship. But, with a little imagination, any of us can relate to times in our lives when we felt ourselves to be at the mercy of forces beyond our control. Maybe, we were as surprised to encounter God's grace coming to our rescue in the midst of those storms as were those disciples who watched in wonder as Jesus turned a typhoon into a dead calm. Then, there are other times, when our woundedness won't wait for grace to arrive on its own timetable. Times when we feel compelled to pursue Grace.

Today's reading from Mark invites us to imagine what that might look like by intertwining a tale of two tragedies. The story begins with Jesus and the disciples returning from their trip across the Sea of Galilee. They have hardly set foot back on dry land, when a large crowd gathers around them. A figure emerges from the crowd, falls at Jesus' feet and begs Jesus to come to his house and heal his daughter, who is terminally ill. The man's name is Jairus. And everyone in the crowd knows it, because he is one of the leaders of the local synagogue.

Now, up to this point religious leaders like Jairus have not been fans of Jesus. They were wary of his growing popularity. And a big contributor to his positive reputation had been the many healings people had witnessed Jesus performing. So, for someone like Jairus to publicly bow down to Jesus and request that Jesus heal his daughter, shows how desperate he was to save his child's life. Even to the point of putting his reputation in the community and his position in the synagogue on the line.

Without hesitation, Jesus and his disciples follow Jairus to his house, jostling their way through the crowd along the way. But, lurking in that crowd is someone else; someone as desperate as Jairus for healing. Unlike the well-known Jairus, she is anonymous, and wants to keep it that way. At one time she might have been as well-to-do as Jairus. But that was before she was struck with a condition of chronic hemorrhaging that had lasted so far for twelve years. She had spent everything she had looking for a doctor who could cure her. Which left her destitute and in even worse health than when she began. No doubt, she would have heard the stories of the miraculous healings Jesus had done for others. So, her desperate search for a cure naturally led her to Jesus.

There was a problem though. A woman with a condition like the one she had was considered ritually unclean under the Levitical Law. If a woman in her condition touched a man, he too would be unclean. And there would be consequences for her if that happened. So, approaching Jesus and introducing herself to him, and baring her soul about what brought her to him (the

way Jairus did) was out of the question. Instead, she snuck up behind Jesus, reached through the gauntlet of bodies around him, stretched out her hand and touched the hem of his robe. But it was like touching a live wire. Instantly, she felt the disease leave her body.

Jesus felt it, too. He spun around, searching the faces in the crowd. “Who was it that touched me?” he asks aloud. His disciples shook their heads in disbelief. Who touched him? Who *hadn’t* touched him?! They couldn’t understand why Jesus was allowing himself to get distracted from his errand to heal Jairus’ daughter.

No less puzzling was why the woman did not just melt safely back into the crowd. After all, she had received what she had hoped for. She was physically healed! But she had experienced something else when her fingers grazed the coarse fabric that covered Jesus’ body. Something that had been denied her for so very long that she had forgotten what it felt like. What it felt like to not be alienated from God.

Instead of retreating into the anonymity of the mob, she steps forward in fear and trembling. Maybe it was the fear and trembling that accompanies an expectation of anger and humiliation. Or, possibly it was the fear and trembling that follows an unexpected and awe filled experience of grace. In front of everyone, Jesus confirms her worth. He calls her daughter. “Daughter, your faith has made you well,” he tells her. “Go in peace and be healed of your disease.”

Meanwhile, messengers arrive with solemn news for Jairus. His daughter has died. No point in troubling Jesus any further. Nevertheless, Jesus still goes to his house. When he gets there, he restores the girl to life.

Two different stories of tragic need and desperation. A man who ran the risk of losing everything to save his daughter. And a woman who had already lost it all. Two lives that intersect because they both decide to go all or nothing with their faith in Jesus. Is there a place where your story intersects with theirs? Have there been—are there--wounds in your life that compel you to pursue God’s grace and healing?

In the biblical Book of Lamentations, it says that God “does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.” But affliction and grief sometimes move us to seek God’s presence and grace in ways we never would have chosen for ourselves. We can let our lives be defined by our wounds, or we can use our wounds as a gateway to a deeper experience of God and God’s grace.

Macrina Wiederkehr has written a beautiful poem about this mystery—the mystery of how we can accept, and even feel gratitude for—the wounds of life that ushered us into the presence of divine grace. It is written from the perspective of the woman in this story who was healed by touching the hem of Jesus’ robe.

Once there was a wound
 It was no ordinary wound
 It was *my* wound
 We had lived together long.

I yearned to be free of this wound
I wanted the bleeding to stop
Yet if the truth be known
I felt a strange kind of gratitude
for this wound

It made me tremendously open to grace
vulnerable to God's mercy.
A beautiful believing in me
that I have named Faith
kept growing, daring me
to reach for what I could not see.

This wound had made me open.
I was ready for grace
And so one day, I reached.

There I was thick in the crowd
bleeding and believing
and I reached.

At first I reached
for what I *could* see
the fringe of a garment,
But my reaching didn't stop there
for Someone reached back into me.
A grace I *couldn't* see
flowed through me.
A power I didn't understand
began to fill the depths of me.

Trembling I was called forth
to claim my wholeness.
The *bleeding* had left me.
The *believing* remained
And strange as this may sound
I have never lost my gratitude
for the wound
that made me so open to grace.

Friends, if there be a woundedness in your life today; whether it be a sudden and uninvited visitor, or something that has lived within you for a very long time; if this woundedness has held you in the grip of its bondage, or has defined you in the eyes of others or to your own eyes, so that you have forgotten to see yourself from the eyes of Jesus, who reminds you of who you

really are—daughters and sons of God—may that woundedness become your invitation to step forward and claim your wholeness.

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