

In our story today, Jesus brings healing to two daughters of Israel. Listen!

Mark 5:21-43

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him, and he was by the sea. ²² Then 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.”

²⁴ So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now, there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She 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.” ²⁹ Immediately, 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?” ³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

³⁵ While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” ³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When 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.” ⁴⁰ And 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.

Just before today’s story, Jesus had healed a man possessed by demons as he sent the demons into a herd of swine who then plunged to their death. The townspeople responded that you need to leave now, no, really, get out. And so, Jesus leaves Gentile territory and crosses the sea again. As he arrives on the other side, our story begins with two desperate people who desire healing and are interrupting Jesus’ plans. Whatever his itinerary, he must make changes to meet the needs of people encounters.

Unlike the people who wanted to run Jesus out of town, two folks want to get near him and won't let anything, not even a huge crowd, stop them. They both force their way through the crowd to get to Jesus.

I often think of Biblical texts in terms of song lyrics, mostly rock and roll, classic rock, folk, and soul. Two songs came to mind that capture the characters in our story. First, Jairus cries out the old song by Simon and Garfunkel: "Save the life of my child, cried the desperate mother." And the woman whose bleeding would not stop reminded me of Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers singing, "If I could just touch the hem of His garment, I know I'll be made whole."

Let's look for a minute at the main characters Jesus encounters. Jairus is a prominent Jewish leader in the synagogue. He is an important official in the eyes of his community. He was probably a man of comparatively great wealth in his peasant society.

In contrast to many leaders, this man trusts that this itinerant healer will save his child. He casts aside all decorum, rank, and entitlement and falls to his knees in front of Jesus, begging, not once but repeatedly, to "save the life of my daughter." Prestige and power didn't matter. His daughter mattered. Community standing didn't matter. His daughter mattered, so he cried out, "Help me, Jesus!" How does Jesus handle this interruption to his plans? Jesus stops, makes a course correction to deal with the interruption, and heads off with him to save his daughter.

As they are on their way, a courageous woman boldly elbows through the crowd and comes up behind Jesus. She had not stopped bleeding for twelve years, and the so-called healers had taken all her money and left her worse off than when she started. She believes that all she must do is touch his clothing, and she will be made well. She has none of the social standing, power, and prestige of Jairus, and yet she shares his faith that Jesus can make a difference. Jesus can heal her. So, she reaches out and touches his clothing, and Jesus notices it. He wants to know "Who touched me?"—another interruption.

Of course, the disciples, who are often slow on the uptake said, "Look at the crowd; how could we possibly tell?" And yet Jesus stops, just like he stopped for Jairus, a man of status, he stopped for this woman and treated her the same way he treated Jairus. He treats her as having equal standing with Jairus. He again adjusts his plans.

This unnamed woman has interpreted Jesus' plans to go straight to Jairus's house. And Jesus stops to deal with the interruption. Allow me to interrupt your day.

Someone once said ministry, love in action often happens in life's interruptions.

I have a calendar on my phone that lists my main activities and to-dos for each day. When someone asks me to do something or be somewhere, I say, "Let me put it on my calendar 'cause if it's not there, it's not happening." In the morning, I list these activities from my calendar on my Orange

Panda Planner with a picture of my dog Gus, and I have my schedule and tasks listed and have neatly ordered my day.

But as someone once said, “I plan; God laughs.” For example, when the phone rings, a text arrives, or I receive an email, or I see a squirrel out my window, interruptions to my well-ordered day start to come calling.

It’s like this one summer Sunday afternoon: a group of kids are playing ball in the street. One girl knocks it over the fence, and it lands in a stranger’s backyard. She bravely knocks on the door everyone else was afraid to. They thought the game was over.

A man gets up from his weekly post-Sunday luncheon stupor in front of the Yankees game and sleepily answers the door. This is his plan; he does it every week.

He hears the request to retrieve the ball, and the last thing he wants to do is get off the couch, go in the backyard, and get the ball, yet he does. Even though he would rather not, he gets off the couch and performs a deed of kindness called forth by an interruption to his well-ordered Sunday afternoon.

A faithful life is like that; interruptions serve as opportunities for ministry and loving-kindness in action, even when we would rather not. Most of them are not dramatic; they are everyday acts of kindness and compassion that require us to get up off the couches of our lives and do a small kindness.

I know there are times when I am on a roll and really getting something important done and don’t want to be interrupted, but then I recall a childhood memory. I remember my father (who died when I was thirteen) raised me as a single parent. When I would call him at work and say, “Are you busy?” he would reply, “I’m never too busy for you.” I have never forgotten that answer, and it has helped shape my life to this day.

But what of those rare times when the interruptions are enormous and call forth something dramatic? By doing everyday acts of kindness, we are in training for those times more than getting off the couch is called for.

May your life be blessed by interruptions. Many of the most incredible things in life happen during interruptions. How we handle them defines who we are.

Back to our story:

Well, this woman of lower social standing and ritually unclean due to her bleeding interrupts Jesus, and he stops. That’s who Jesus is; he stops to deal with her. She owns up to the fact it was she who touched him.

He speaks kindly to her, calls her daughter, and thus includes her in his family. She is now of the house and lineage of Jesus. He gives her the same respect and attention that Jairus received.

Well, this interruption seems to have messed everything up as some folks come and say to Jairus, “Your daughter,” the third featured character in this drama, “has died, so don't bother the teacher any longer.” Jairus is crushed. Jesus replies, “You hang in there, Jairus.” “Trust me, don't stop believing, don't worry 'bout a thing; every little thing's gonna be all right.” as Bob Marley sings.

“Trust me,” Jesus says to Jairus and calls to all of us. It is the second question I ask when people join the church. First, “Who is your Lord and Savior?” “Jesus Christ.” “Do you trust him?” And Jairus, having witnessed the faith of the woman who touched Jesus, has had his faith strengthened by her and continues home with Jesus.

So, Jesus arrives and dismisses the professional mourners who have arrived from the village. Jesus knew they couldn't grasp it when Jesus said, “Little girl, rise up.” They couldn't handle it when she did, and Jesus said to give her something to eat.

The little girl is almost overlooked in the story, but she is a vulnerable but loved child dependent on her father's standing and prestige. And Jesus heals her.

So, two healing stories that began with characters of different social statuses and societal standing interrupt Jesus. There is a prestigious leader of the synagogue, a poor, sickly, courageous, and faithful woman, and a vulnerable child, and Jesus stops what he is doing for all of them and ministers to them. He helps them all to see they are of the house and lineage of Jesus.

That is a story for us, one that speaks as we gather to worship today in a beautiful sanctuary given sacrificially by many. It is truly a place where Jairus would feel right at home. But it is also a place for the bold woman who secretly touches Jesus' garment. It is also a place for the vulnerable, like Jairus' daughter, who depends on others.

That creates a difficulty for us, not because they wouldn't be welcome; of course, they would be welcome. But the difficulty arises because they might be afraid they wouldn't be welcome. Like Jesus, we need to reach out and touch them and say, “Welcome daughter, to the family.” We must reach out with Jesus' healing touch that raises people up.

That is hard work because many people are afraid the church will judge them as unworthy rather than seeing them as a child of God. And some may not even realize they belong to God and are part of our family.

But even if they can't see themselves that way, we can see them as precious children of God. They may think they are too far gone, but we must see them through the eyes of Jesus. People often see themselves as they believe others see them, so we must make it clear we see them as children of God. They, too, are people who also belong to the house and lineage of Jesus.

But what about us? Even some of us need healing and feel ashamed to admit it, so we pretend everything is all right. We may not cry out like Jairus on the outside, but on the inside, we are needy. We may look and act like we have it all together, but we don't, and we are afraid to admit it because of how it would look. How would we look if people knew? We need some of Jairus' courage to come to Jesus and ask for our help. We need the trust of the unnamed woman who knows Jesus can make us whole. We must see ourselves as Jesus sees us, as precious children of God.

That is also part of what we are doing today: we gather in a place where people don't have to have it all together to be welcomed, loved, and accepted for who they are, precious, often messed up, beloved children of God.

We are not called to be people who have it all together. We are called to trust Jesus and invite others to do that, too. We are the church. We work to continue to build a community where all are welcome. In doing so, we give glory to Jesus, who stops for everyone, including you and me. And he calls us to do the same for others, for we are all of the house and lineage of Jesus.