

12

Psalm 130
Mark 5:21-43

If you do much reading you know that every author has a literary fingerprint. You would never confuse Dr. Seuss with Maurice Sendek, or Pat Conroy with Toni Morrison.

Each of the gospel writers has a style, too. John is all about symbolism. Luke spins a rich and engaging yarn, just the sort of storyteller you would expect a physician to be, full of color and details. And while I would never call Mark a literary thug, he is not exactly known for his flowery or descriptive writing. He will never win a Nobel. He tells you what you need to know in as few words as possible; the bare bones. Maybe not terse, but certainly concise.

But he can still tell a mean story even without all the verbiage. What he does is drop hints, and one of those hints he uses is geography. What you heard last week when Bob preached was that Jesus got in a boat and went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Not an unimportant detail, like telling us that the boat had blue cushions, or they ate sandwiches along the way. What he was telling us, as you now know, is that Jesus was doing mission work. When they crossed the Sea they were in Gentile country. The land of people who keep pigs. Clearly not Jews. Mark is telling us that Jesus didn't just come for the Jews. God's love, God's salvation, was for all people.

Well, in today's reading Jesus crosses back over the Sea. He comes home. And who should meet him on the other side but Jairus. A leader of the synagogue. Again, another subtle clue to understanding this story. What he wants us to know is that Jairus is a man of power and responsibility, and probably a man of great wealth. But he is also a man of desperation and fear. His 12 year old daughter is gravely ill, and there is nothing he can do about it. His power, his influence and position, his wealth, none of them can save her. She is dying. Perhaps I am biased, but the fear of losing a child has to be the greatest fear anyone, any parent at least, can ever have.

Now before we go on remember that there is another clue buried in Mark's brief description of Jairus. If he is a leader in the synagogue he is used to getting what he wants. But the synagogue is where Jesus has been rejected and ridiculed. Jesus was popular with the crowds, but held in contempt by people exactly like Jairus, so Jairus is assuming some risk in coming to Jesus. He believes what the 'official' synagogue party line does not. He believes with his whole heart and soul that Jesus can do what he is asking. Just recently the fearful disciples asked themselves who Jesus is, that even the wind and the waves obey him. Jairus may not know any better than they do who he is, but he does know better than they seem to the sort of power and authority he has. He doesn't ask Jesus if he *can*, he asks Jesus if he *will* heal his little girl.

And it is here that Mark again shows himself to be a brilliant storyteller. With an economy of words he's painted a picture of desperation and urgency: a child on the brink of death, a frantic father, urging Jesus to come, and to come quickly. And he does. But

then Mark interrupts his own story with another story. While Jesus and the great crowd are on the way to Jairus' house, something happens. Another equally desperate person seeks Jesus out. Secretly, though. This person is not a well-known, well-respected leader in the community; not a person of means and authority. While Jairus represents one end of the social spectrum, this woman represents the other. She is a woman, first of all. But she is also a sick woman, and she is a poor woman. What she represents is her society's most vulnerable. She has been hemorrhaging for 12 years, and that makes her unclean. A social outcast, excluded from the religious and civic communal life. Everything about her, from her gender to her poverty to her disease would have caused people to look down their noses at her and tell each other that she somehow deserved the life that she was forced to live.

And here is the interesting thing about this woman: even though she thinks to 'steal' some of Jesus' power, even though she doesn't approach Jesus openly as Jairus did and throw herself at his feet and beg, her faith is no different from Jairus'. Like Jairus, she stands in stark contrast to the disciples: maybe she doesn't know exactly who he is, but she sure believes that he has the authority and the power to make her whole and restore her life. She may be sneaky, but she is not wishy-washy.

This is a story about urgency and desperation, remember. A girl's life depends on Jesus. A man's peace of mind depends on Jesus. And what does Jesus do? He stops. These are healing stories, but this is the part that I find most remarkable. He stops. This nameless woman's already been healed. The second she touched Jesus' robe she was healed. She got what she came for. Jesus could have just kept on going. But he didn't. She had reached out to him, and now he reaches out to her. He interrupted his hurried, urgent mission to speak to her, to befriend her, to call her his 'daughter.' He doesn't just allow her to take his power from him and go on her way, he stops what he's doing and treats her with compassion and dignity and mercy.

And then, of course, Mark goes back to the telling of his first story, only now the situation has gone from desperate to dire to utterly hopeless. Jesus has delayed too long. The girl is now dead. The experts tell him so. Maybe not the same experts who told the woman that her condition was hopeless (after taking all her money), or the experts who told poor Jairus that there was nothing they could do for his young daughter, but experts, nonetheless. There was nothing to be done. Except.... take her by her hand and tell her to get up.

I said at one point that these were healing stories, and they are. They are also stories about faith, and about desperation and haste and about stark contrasts. But it is also a story about interruptions, and in the brief couple of minutes that I have left myself, that is what I want to talk about this morning.

Usually when we try to find the meaning in a story we start by asking ourselves who we are in this story. What character do we relate to? What character seems most like us? I would like to suggest that most of us in this story are two people. We have a good dose of Jairus in us. Well-respected, people of position and power in the world. But, people

who have summoned Jesus to our homes for the things that our money and our privilege cannot fix, buy, or heal in us. Most of us can buy what we need and want, but most of us have also figured out that money can't buy everything, and that there are ills in our lives that desperately need to be touched and healed by God.

But while we are rushing Jesus along, worried to death about the people and the problems in our lives that will surely go up in flames if Jesus doesn't hurry, someone else is sneaking through the crowd, hoping to get Jesus' attention as well.

And this is where the story gets tricky. If you and I are Jairus, only Jairus, then this other person is either our competition or of little consequence to us. But listen to the words of Teresa of Avila:

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours,
Yours are the eyes through which to look out
Christ's compassion to the world
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about
doing good;
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now.*

We aren't just Jairus. Receivers. We are Jairus and Jesus. We are his hands and feet in the world. His eyes, his touch. We can't just pray that God will feed the hungry and house the homeless and visit the lonely and then concentrate on what God is doing for **me**; how God is working in **my** life. In the 30 minutes or so that I was awake and conscious after we got home from the mission trip last night, we watched the tail end of Bruce Almighty. It's about a guy who thinks God's not doing a very good job, so God lets him have a crack at it for a while. See if he can do any better. I won't spoil it for you, but I will say that at the end, God tells Bruce to **be** the miracle he's expecting God to take care of. Don't just pray for the hungry. Feed them. Touch them. Look them in the eye. Don't just pray for the homeless. Give them a place to stay. Learn their names. Listen to their stories. Find a way to end homelessness.

Interrupt your lives. These kids did last week. They interrupted their lives, their preconceived notions about what poor and homeless people were like. What our older adults in nursing care facilities are like. They took risks to do Jesus' work. And what they learned is that while these folks were very different from them in many ways, as different as Jairus and the nameless woman were, they were alike in many more ways.

Who is trying to get your attention? What nameless, hurting people are reaching out to you, needing you to be the touch of Christ in their lives? The folks at IHN? A lonely neighbor? A teenager? An older adult whose children live far away?

One last question: Will you interrupt your lives for them?