

“Faith Is the Victory”

By Reverend Dr. Fontella Irons

Bible Text: Gospel of Mark 5:21-43

It really is the story of a great impossibility. The central figures are a misunderstood Messiah, an unnamed critically ill woman and a nearly dead girl. In the Gospel of Mark, those closest to the Messiah never seemed to understand Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark, the dominating powers of the day conspired to destroy Jesus, largely due to his authoritative claims as the “Son of Man” and the “Son of God.” His family even concluded that he had gone mad. Again, this Gospel really is an account of great impossibilities.

And yet, this sick woman and the father of this dying girl placed their hope in the Jesus as Messiah. They viewed him as the way out of their suffering. Why not? After all, he repeatedly proclaimed the kingdom of God for the poor, the sick, the crippled, the tax collectors, and the sinners. Eventually, he demonstrated his solidarity with those who suffered as he moved into direct union with their pain. The unification occurred as he died a horrific death of crucifixion. In the Gospel of Mark, his death became the hope of resurrection for those who suffer.

In Mark 5:21-43, the burden of suffering is placed on the shoulders of an unlikely pair – a sick woman and a dying girl. The dying girl's father begs for help on her behalf; the woman must stand alone in her suffering. But this woman's story is not hers alone. Her story is the story of the Markan followers of Jesus. Her suffering is their suffering. She is symbolic of the suffering they face as they seek to continue the mission of their crucified Messiah. The Markan group, like this woman, must stand alone in the midst of suffering if it is to survive. It is a difficult place to stand, but their hope rests in what lies beyond present circumstance – the day of resurrection.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark there exists an image of constantly blaring, constantly flashing red sirens. Jesus is getting into the boat; Jesus is getting out of the boat. Once the boat docks, Jesus' touch transforms a life. A leper is cured. A blind man receives sight. But the storm continues to rage. Unclean spirits cause swine to commit suicide. A boy foams at the mouth, thrashing about wildly as demons possess his soul. Jesus isn't immune to the commotion: His family concludes He has gone insane.

The passage before us today begins with Jairus, a synagogue leader, who begs Jesus to heal his dying daughter. That scene is interrupted by the encounter between an unnamed suffering woman and Jesus.

I imagine that everything stood still as this woman encounters Jesus. The crowd is huge. In the midst of the patriarchal society in which she existed, her presence alone must have caused her to stand out in the crowd. But I imagine that the frenzied crowd froze as this woman and Jesus exchanged words. The exchange must have looked odd, even strange. Still, this woman stands her ground and talks with Jesus. The story is vital to the entire Gospel of Mark.

This woman has suffered from hemorrhages for 12 years. She finds relief after she hears, and believes, in the miraculous healings of Jesus. But her encounter with Jesus begins in secret as she touches the hem of His cloak (5:27). Her touch is followed healing. Her healing remains a secret, but Jesus – in uncharacteristic fashion in Mark – wants to make this healing known. He questions what has happened (30-31). This forces the woman to speak, making known her transformation from sufferer to healed. And, what does Jesus tell her after she speaks?

Jesus said to her: *“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease,”* Mark 5:34. (NRSV). Several translations differ slightly on this verse. The New International Version offers this translation: *“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from you suffering.”* The King James Version offers this translation: *“Daughter, thy faith had made thee whole; go in peace, and be*

whole of thy plague.” I offer this translation: *“Daughter, your faith saves you; go into peace and exist whole (or cured or well) from your disease.”*

I think that my translation points more clearly to the association Mark makes between faith, salvation, and suffering.

We must always believe that we are “saved” even when we suffer. If we mirror this woman’s actions, we too can look forward to a day when suffering is not final. This is where the outcome of Jairus’ belief provides a useful bookend to this woman’s story: His daughter, who in spite of suffering and death, is resurrected. The result of suffering is not final. The final result of human suffering, like the divine suffering of Jesus, is resurrection. The writer of Hebrews offers us this thought: *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him,”* Hebrews 11:6 (NRSV).

May you continue to seek God. May you always believe that God hears your prayers. Put your complete trust in God today. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

May Jesus Christ continue to keep you. Amen.