

Mark 5:21–43 (NRSV)

<sup>21</sup>When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. <sup>22</sup>Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet <sup>23</sup>and 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.” <sup>24</sup>So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. <sup>25</sup>Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup>She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup>She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup>for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” <sup>29</sup>Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. <sup>30</sup>Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” <sup>31</sup>And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” <sup>32</sup>He looked all around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup>But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup>He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

<sup>35</sup>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?” <sup>36</sup>But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” <sup>37</sup>He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. <sup>38</sup>When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup>When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” <sup>40</sup>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. <sup>41</sup>He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” <sup>42</sup>And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. <sup>43</sup>He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

*No one wants to travel down Adversity Avenue, but we all do. Sadly, we will drive down that dark path more than once. What lies at the end of that road? Does it lead us toward God or away from God?*

Sooner or later, we are all personally confronted by suffering. Our suffering might stem from illness or divorce, from the loss of a job or the death of a loved one – difficult times come at us from many directions. Suffering, in all its forms, forces us to confront the fact that the world, and our lives in it, are not as they should be. All the brokenness, pain, and strife force us to confront our most foundational beliefs about God and about ourselves. In the midst of difficulty and suffering, do we turn *to* God or do we turn *from* God?<sup>1</sup> Such choices are made all the more difficult because pain and hurt and

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<sup>1</sup>The Weekly Bible Study for January 17, 2010, “The Question of Evil,” looked at the nature of God and the presence of real suffering. You can download a copy at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) where all the Weekly Bible Studies are archived.

shock often throw us into mental and emotional disarray that can make it hard to think straight or to look ahead more than a step or two.

In today's scripture passage, we meet a man whose daughter lies near death and a woman who has been sick and shunned for twelve years. Mark tells us about the choices they make in the face of adversity.

### *A Woman Suffers*

Mark 5 is focused on stories of Jesus crossing back and forth across the Sea of Galilee. He goes to the eastern shore, a Gentile area, where he confronts demons that are possessing a man. Jesus sends the demons into a herd of pigs who fling themselves into the water.

Now, Jesus has returned to the western side of the Sea of Galilee. He begins to teach but is quickly interrupted by a man who throws himself at Jesus' feet. The despairing and distraught man is named Jairus. He is no common villager; he is an administrator of some sort in the local synagogue, a man of influence and means. How shocking that such an important man would lose all control of himself.

#### Who Wrote the Gospel of Mark?

Many people don't realize that all four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – were written anonymously. None of them bear the author's name. The names these Gospels bear come to us from the early church, in the first few centuries after Jesus' resurrection. The early church believed that the writer of Mark's Gospel was a companion of Peter who got most of his material from Peter's preaching and eyewitness accounts. Many early Christians further believed that Mark, the author, was also John Mark in Acts (see Acts 12:2, 25; 15:37-39).

Regardless of who wrote Mark, we, as part of the Christian community, affirm that Mark's Gospel and the rest of the Bible are inspired by God in a way unlike any other writings. We proclaim that all the authors were "illuminated by the Holy Spirit" and bear true witness to God and God's work.

Jairus tells Jesus that his daughter lies near death. Will Jesus come and lay his hands on the girl? Jairus is convinced that by doing so, Jesus will make his daughter well.

Jesus quickly heads off with Jairus, but while they are making their way to his home, a large crowd presses in on this miracle worker.

In the crowd, there is a woman who has suffered from female hemorrhaging for twelve years. Imagine such a thing. She'd been to all the doctors, such as they were in her day, and had spent all her money but to no avail. No matter what she did, she got worse, not better. For twelve years this had gone on!

As difficult and worrisome as her physical ailments must have been, the nature of her illness rendered her a social outcast. According to Jewish law (see Leviticus 15:25-30), a woman was "unclean" during any time of female hemorrhaging. For most women, this was only several days each month, but for the woman in the crowd, her bleeding meant that she had been ritualistically unclean for twelve years. Any Jew who touched her, or her bed, or anything she sat on would become unclean also; thus, for twelve

years this woman had not experienced the slightest touch of another person. She had lived apart, an outcast; she might well have been a leper. It is pretty hard even to imagine what her life must have been like. Little wonder that she went in search of this miracle worker.

### *A Woman Chooses*

Because the woman was ritualistically unclean and untouchable, you can almost picture those in the crowd who knew her struggling to avoid her touch as she surges toward Jesus. Believing, as did her contemporaries, that Jesus' power would be carried

even in his clothing, the woman sneaks up behind Jesus and quickly touches his garment.

Though the woman believed that by touching Jesus' clothing she would be healed, in what must have been a moment of overwhelming joy, she is healed instantly and feels the overwhelming power of that healing. Jesus too feels the power of the healing, but he is not sure who touched him. He asks his disciples who touched him, but they respond sensibly enough (and with a little exasperation) that it is impossible to know because there are so many people in the crowd.

Reflect for a moment on the fact that Jesus knows that healing power has gone out from him, but he doesn't know to whom. This healing, this salvation, is no act of Jesus' will, nothing that he purposely intended. The woman simply touches Jesus' clothing and is healed. It is as if Jesus simply *is* healing and salvation; much like the sun simply *is* warmth and light.

This ill and shunned woman, who had found the courage to come to a crowd of people in the first place, and then had been bold enough to touch the miracle-working teacher, now finds the strength to come forward, in all her fear and trembling, to confess that it had been she who touched Jesus. Frankly, it boggles the mind. You and I probably have little appreciation of what it must have taken for her to come that day in her uncleanness and risk even worse ostracism. But Jesus understood. When she confesses what she has done (which was to make Jesus ritualistically unclean by touching him!), he tells her that her faith has made her well and that she can "go in peace" and be healed of her affliction.

The "peace" with which Jesus blesses her is far more than relief from anxiety or fear. This peace is what God wills, not merely for the body or the soul or even for the human race alone, but for his whole creation.<sup>2</sup> This peace is wholeness and salvation. There is a spiritual dimension to Jesus' healing of this woman. Not only did her bleeding stop, but she was made ritualistically clean, again able to touch and to be touched. Her steadfast faith in the power of Jesus enabled her to begin rebuilding right relationships with her neighbors and loved ones. It is the putting right of relationships that lies at the heart of the meaning of salvation.<sup>3</sup>

The woman had suffered for a very long time. It wouldn't surprise us if she had become bitter and alienated from God. In the midst of suffering, many people do begin to doubt God's love or God's goodness or even God's existence. But this woman did not embrace anger or doubt. She turned *to* God, not *from* God. Some might say that her choice was made out of nothing more than blind desperation. Jesus knew otherwise. He saw that her choice to turn to him had been made out of faith alone. Her act of faith resulted in a physical and spiritual healing that went to the center of her being.

*But what about Jairus' daughter?*

While Jesus is still speaking to the woman, someone comes to tell Jesus and Jairus that the daughter is dead. But Jesus, being Jesus, encourages the father to believe and heads to the house with only Peter, James, and John beside him. When they get to the house, everything is a commotion, with many tears and much mourning. Jesus tells them all that the girl is not dead and everyone laughs at him – they know dead when they see it.

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<sup>2</sup>Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1995, c1985). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. The word translated "peace" is *eirene* in the Greek and corresponds to *shalom* in Hebrew.

<sup>3</sup>So often I hear Christians reduce eternal salvation to the "mere" forgiving of sins. But this forgiveness is only the means to the true end – the restoring of right, true, and loving relationships between God and his people.

Nonetheless, Jesus takes the father and mother into the girl's room and then, I imagine while everyone holds their breath in fear and apprehension, Jesus tells the girl to get up . . . and she does!<sup>4</sup> This twelve-year old girl jumps out of her bed and paces the room. Surely, Jesus' brain is the only one in the room that is still working, so he tells the parents to get the girl something to eat. So matter of fact; so astonishing . . . so Jesus.

God doesn't promise us a physical healing or a miraculous return from the dead in response to our faith, but he does promise us that he will never abandon us and that, even in the midst of the most profound suffering, we can find wholeness and peace in God's love – if only we will choose to turn *to* him, not *from* him when we travel down Adversity Avenue.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. It isn't hard to understand how suffering might drive a person *from* God. Life can seem so far removed from God's goodness. We ask, "How could God be all-good and all-powerful and there be such suffering?!" Yet, as Christians we make a most remarkable claim. Yes, we suffer, but God knows our suffering first-hand. Jesus on the cross has to mean that God suffers with us! How might this perspective help us come to grips with pain and suffering? Do you find it comforting to put your faith in a God-who-suffers?
2. Life's trials can turn us into pretty poor decision-makers. The traumas of illness or divorce can make it very difficult for us to find our way forward. How can we help others make better choices in difficult times? Is this something we ought to try to do – or just stay out of? Discuss the delicate balance between offering help and offering too much help. How can we go about building Christian relationships that can help us when we get into trouble or difficulty – when *we* are the ones at risk of making bad choices?
3. The hemorrhaging woman was a social outcast. We don't usually think of ourselves as living in a culture where ill people are shunned and made into outcasts. Yet, I wonder if this is really so. AIDS has often been a disease whose victims were cast out of "proper society." Are there other diseases that turn its victims into social outcasts? Is it a simple matter of being afraid of "catching" the illness or is something more at work? Discuss the ways in which ostracism would make any illness more difficult to bear.
4. Rev. Edlen Cowley wrote some helpful discussion questions for the Fellowship Groups that are meeting this spring:
  1. What are the significant points about the woman in this text?
  2. Why do you think she was so excited to hear that Jesus was coming to town?
  3. Do you think Jairus had great patience? Could you be as patient as he was?
  4. Jesus' touch changed this woman's life. Perhaps it wasn't an instantaneous healing, but have you ever experienced Jesus' touch in your life?
  5. The story contains two miracles. Do you believe in miracles? Have you experienced a miracle in your life?
  6. The people with Jairus' daughter thought Jesus was too late. They laughed at him when he said that she was just sleeping. Have you ever thought something it was too late for something to be saved only to find that a change happened anyway?

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<sup>4</sup>It is crucial to grasp that this is another story of someone brought *back* from death to life, a resuscitation. The girl went on to be an adult and would someday die, again. Such stories are signposts to resurrection and the defeat of death. But only Jesus has been resurrected to new life, never to taste death again.

## *Daily Bible Readings*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Monday, Matthew 9:18-26</b> Matthew's telling of these stories.</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, Luke 8:40-56</b> Luke's telling of the stories; How do these versions differ?</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, Leviticus 15</b> Male and female uncleanness in the Old Testament law.</p>	<p><b>Thursday, Mark 6:1-6a</b> After the remarkable acts of healing and restoration, Jesus is rejected in his hometown. How could this be!?</p>
<p><b>Friday, Romans 8:35-39</b> Nothing – no suffering or hardship -- can separate us from God's love!</p>	<p><b>Prayers of Joy and Concern</b></p>

