

Mark 5:21–43 (NIV)

²¹ When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. ²³ He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” ²⁴ So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. ²⁵ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” ²⁹ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

³⁰ At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

³¹ “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ”

³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

³⁶ Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha koum!*” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”).

⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

John 6:1–15 (NIV)

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

The true story

Talk about drawing a crowd. Everywhere Jesus went crowds pressed in on him, demanding to see, to touch, just to be near him. Four friends cut a hole in the roof to get their paralyzed buddy in front of him. But Jesus saw these crowds and he loved them for he was their shepherd. He healed them and he fed them. Even so, there were times when Jesus had to withdraw for a while to be alone with Father and pray. Probably good advice for us all.

There is only miracle story that spans all four gospels. The feeding of the thousands. Five thousand men, which means 15,000-20,000 total. It is hard to imagine. All of them following and pressing, wanting to be near Jesus, to hear him well. So Jesus gives of himself and feeds them. Perhaps we shouldn't wonder very long how such a thing should be, but simply rest in this act of creative love. But we begin with a very different story, one about Jesus' healing power flowing outward without any conscious effort on his part. Just so remarkable!

Lost in the Crowd

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? Such choices are made all the more difficult because pain and hurt and 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 the above Scripture passage from Mark, 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.

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

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 John Mark who we meet 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.

woman had not experienced the slightest touch of another person. She had lived apart, an outcast; she might as well have been a leper. It is hard 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 humanity alone, but for his whole creation.¹ 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.²

The woman had suffered for a very long time. It wouldn’t surprise us if she had become bitter and alienated from God. Amid 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 of nothing more than blind desperation. Jesus knew otherwise. He saw that her choice to turn to him had been made 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.

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!³ 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.

A hungry crowd of thousands

Sometimes a miracle is not just a miracle. Jesus’ feeding of thousands with a few fish and loaves of bread is the only miracle story told in all four Gospels. So, the question is why this particular miracle held such power over the early Christians?

John’s gospel

Though written from differing perspectives and for varied audiences, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke share much material. Matthew and Luke probably had a copy of Mark’s Gospel when they wrote their own. Indeed, the three Gospels are often referred to as the synoptic Gospels, meaning simply “read together,” emphasizing some of their similarities. But John’s Gospel is quite different. It was the last to be written and shares little material with the other three. For example, almost none of miracles recounted in the synoptic Gospels are found in the Gospel of John and vice versa. John is very clear about why he wrote another Gospel: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31). In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ miracles are often concrete expressions of God’s kingdom. For example, in the kingdom of God there are no blind or lame, so Jesus makes the blind see and the lame walk. But in John’s Gospel, Jesus’ miracles are signs to his true identity.

¹Kittel, 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.

²So 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.

³It is crucial to grasp that this is another story of someone brought *back* from death to life, a resurrection. 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.

More than a miracle

On the surface, this miracle story is simple. A huge crowd has gathered and there is enough food only for a few. Jesus tests his disciples by asking how the crowd will be fed. Typically enough, the disciples don't have a clue. So, Jesus takes the loaves and fish, blesses them, and then distributes them. Miraculously, there is enough to feed fifteen or twenty thousand people. The crowds take the miracle to be a sign that Jesus is the "prophet who is come into the world," the one who can teach in God's name.

But we would be mistaken if we understood this story to be about no more than Jesus' astounding powers. Instead, this is a profoundly rich story that taps into the very core of the Christian faith. There is more going on than we can do justice to in this brief study, but here are a few keys:

- John notes that this miracle happened during Passover, which celebrates the Exodus of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt. Thus, John introduces the theme of the Exodus and God's provision for his people which figures so prominently in this chapter.
- Jesus knows what he is going to do to feed the crowds, but he wants to know if Philip, Andrew, and the other of his close disciples know. Have they begun to grasp the source of Jesus' power and, hence, his identity? Evidently not. Rather than understanding that Jesus is about to do something that will reveal God's glory, Philip and Andrew respond with practical concerns about how much it would cost to feed so many. Throughout the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, even his closest disciples have great difficulty truly grasping who it is that they follow.
- John's Gospel was written late in the first century. The Christian community had shared the Lord's Supper, the eucharist⁴, for decades. Jesus' taking of the bread, giving thanks, and distributing it is clearly evocative of the sacred meal shared by all Christians.
- Just as Moses instructed the people to pick up all the manna, Jesus makes sure that all the uneaten fragments are gathered up. Truly, God not only provides for our most basic needs (like food) but does so to overflowing!

Jesus -- "the bread of life"

After the crowd had been fed, the disciples and Jesus crossed the sea to Capernaum. Of course, the disciples left in a boat. But Jesus walked across the water to join them later

Manna from God

Jesus' feeding on the hillside was not the first time that God had miraculously fed his people. More than a millennium before, the Israelites had fled slavery in Egypt. Escaping into the Sinai wilderness, the people quickly realized that they did not have enough food. Not surprisingly, some of them complained that it would have been better to die in Egypt than to starve in the desert (see Exodus 16). Hearing the complaints of his people, God, being of grace and mercy, fed them.

One evening, the Israelite camp was covered with quail. The next morning, the ground was covered with a white bread-like substance that the people could simply pick up off the ground and eat. They called it *manna*. Moses told them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat." To teach them that they needed to depend on God daily, the manna would become inedible after a time. Moses instructed them to pick it all up, not leaving any behind. Similarly, Jesus instructed the people "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost."

⁴ Though in Methodism we don't often use the word "eucharist" to denote the Lord's Supper, it comes from the Greek word *euchariseo* meaning "giving thanks." John uses it in v. 5 when Jesus gives thanks over the loaves.

(6:16-21). The crowds went to Capernaum to seek Jesus out, but they could not see past the miracle to the deeper meaning of Jesus' actions. Later in chapter 6, John gives us some of Jesus' most profound teachings about his own significance. Drawing on the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty (v.35). . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh (v. 51)." Whereas the crowd had been concerned about the fullness of their bellies, Jesus offers them true bread and foresees his own sacrifice on their behalf.

John uses these stories to teach us that a miracle or sign, all by itself, is never really the point . . . it cannot be an adequate basis for our faith. Instead, Jesus calls for us to grasp the deeper and richer significance of his life and his death. Metaphors of bread and manna and water had always pointed to the God of Israel but now they point to God through Jesus. God provides . . . through Jesus; God multiplies . . . through Jesus; God sustains . . . through Jesus; God saves . . . through Jesus. Glory be to God.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Afternoon Class

Current study: *Isaiah*

We continue our study of Isaiah, begun only a couple of weeks ago. I hope you can join us!!

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

Current study: *John's Gospel*

Meeting on-line at 12:00 noon Tuesday on Scott's Facebook ministry page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC".

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Both classes are recorded and are available each week in my podcast at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts and elsewhere. Search by "Scott Engle Bible Studies".

Scott's Sunday Class

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 in Smith Worship Center and on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

We are on a journey through the biblical story, *God-Is*. Each week, we will follow the sermon at 9:30 and dig a little deeper into the Scriptures for that week.

Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel. Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.