

Mark (5:21-43) portrays a powerful, wealthy man of considerable prestige seeking healing for his daughter. He interrupts this story with the story of a destitute, desperate woman of no standing in society seeking healing for herself. She risks much to gain access to health care which is readily available to the ruler.

*One of the rulers of the synagogue* comes to Jesus, begging for help. This is the fifth time in Mark 5 beggars approach Jesus: a legion of unclean spirits beg Jesus not to send them “out of the country,” then beg Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs; the pig farmers, having suffered a catastrophic loss, beg Jesus to leave town; the man who was healed begs to go with Jesus; and, finally, one of the rulers of the synagogue begs Jesus to heal his daughter.

Begging is not what we do when we have other options. Begging is an act of desperation, what we do when we are at the end of our ropes, hanging on by a thread. I can’t think of any more cliches, which is about all we give people who are down on their luck.

“Beggars can’t be choosers.” “Pull yourself up by your boot straps.” Jesus is cliché free. He doesn’t assume beggars are responsible for their lot in life. He acts to relieve their pain.

Not all Jewish authorities were opposed to Jesus. Mark identifies “*one* of the scribes” (Mark 12:28-34) in respectful dialogue with Jesus, and refers to Judas as “*one* of the Twelve.” Among Jesus’ intimate companions there was one who betrayed him, but among Jewish authorities there was one, a sympathetic scribe, who praised him and another, Jairus, who threw himself at his feet begging for help.

The name Jairus means “he enlightens” or “he awakens.” Either name would be appropriate for Jairus, since his *seeing* of Jesus is emphasized in verse 22, and Jesus “awakens” his daughter from the sleep of death.

To be awakened. We hear a lot of late about being “woke,” meaning being alert to injustice in society, especially racism. By sandwiching the story of the destitute woman in the story of the ruler, Mark attempts to awaken his readers to the inequities of his society.

The ruler, because he is a ruler, takes access to health care for granted. The woman has to fight for access. Any reading of the gospels that reduces Jesus’ mission to my personal salvation (healing) without regard for the salvation (healing) of the most destitute is anything but “woke.”

Last week we read the story of a ship in danger of sinking in rough seas. The disciples wake up Jesus and ask, “Do you not care that we are perishing?” The final problem of human existence, as Reinhold Niebuhr put it, is perfectly and finally symbolized in the fact of death.

It is hard to imagine a more soul wrenching experience than the death of a child. The suffering of a child is enough to reduce any parent to begging; it is enough to make any parent ask God, “Do you not care?”

When Jesus arrives at the little girl’s house, it is filled with professional mourners hired (a sign of the ruler’s wealth) to help the family grieve. The fact that the little girl has a room of her own, a great luxury at a time when many homes were one room, is another sign of the ruler’s wealth. It is quite possible the woman in our story was homeless.

The professional mourners laugh at Jesus. Some translations read “they ridiculed him.” Apparently Jesus doesn’t take kindly to being ridiculed. Most translations say Jesus “put them out” or “turned them out,” but the better reading is “Jesus *threw* them out.” I get the image of Patrick Swayze in “Road House,” throwing the trouble makers out of the bar. I like this image of Jesus as the bouncer at death’s door.

“Taking the child’s hand Jesus says, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise.’” “Arise,” not “get up.” Mark is foreshadowing the resurrection, the reality that God does care and has the power to overcome death. What other reading makes any sense of Jesus’ absurd command to the parents that no one should know what happened. The resurrection is foreshadowed but cannot be known until the end of the story.

The experience of touch is a powerful aid in healing. In fact, touch is more powerful than prayer. Whenever Jesus heals through touch, he does not also pray. With his inner circle, in the presence of the girl’s parents, Jesus takes the girl’s hand as parents do when attempting to arouse a child from sleep.

The woman in our story knows the power of touch: “If I may touch even his mantle I shall be healed.” She believes healing is possible. She hopes she too may be healed. And she is willing to do whatever it takes, including interrupting this parade to the ruler’s house. She will not let anything or anyone stop her from touching Jesus.

Touch is powerful. It can heal; it can wound. On top of stories of physical and sexual abuse by those ordained to heal, the pandemic has exacerbated our fear of touching and being touched. Our fears, however legitimate, mask the hunger we know to hold and to be held compassionately. Touching has become risky business and we have become more disconnected and lonely.

Jesus affirms the risk taken by the woman who exhausted the health care system of her day, which left her impoverished and worse off. “Daughter, *your* faith has healed you; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.” *Daughter!* Jesus calls this woman “Daughter.” But whose daughter is she? Is she Jesus’ daughter?

Maybe Jesus is saying women who take risks to gain access to what is taken for granted by rulers, women who challenge the oppressive and abusive norms of the social order, are daughters of God.