

THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL TOUCH (Mark 5:21-43)

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Description: *Jesus both is touched and does the touching in a couple of healings that clearly show His power — and also His amazing grace.*

INTRODUCTION

Some four decades or so after the ministry of Christ, the author of Hebrews gave us one of the most clear, concise and best definitions of faith that anyone is likely to find (and I really like how the ESV phrases it): ***Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen — Hebrews 11:1 (ESV).*** But of course, faith is only as strong as the object in which you are placing such faith. In Jesus Christ, we have the strongest, most sure object of our faith possible.

In today's look at our "Radical Rabbi," we're going to see two moments where such a faith was evidenced, and the amazing healings that was brought in both instances. Once again, we'll be letting the gospel writer Mark tell the bulk of this story, with some assistance from both Matthew and Luke. But before we begin, **let's pause for a moment of prayer.**

TEXT (Mark 5:21-43)

So, we need to start out with a little context first. If you'll remember from a couple of weeks ago, Jesus had had His disciples cross the Sea of Galilee, going from west to east. This was the crossing where a severe storm blew up out of nowhere and scared the disciples half to death. They woke a sleeping Jesus, who both commanded the wind and the waves to stop, and also scolded His disciples for their lack of faith. Then having arrived on the eastern shore, they were met by two demon-possessed men whom Jesus healed. They are now returning to the western side (the Capernaum side) of the lake as today's story begins.

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 — Mark 5:21. Now Luke gives us some extra information, telling us that that large crowd had been expecting Him, and welcomed Him when He arrived. But no sooner had He stepped out of the boat that Jesus got an unexpected visitor — with a very urgent request.

Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at His feet. 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" — Mark 5:22-23.

Now a synagogue leader was not a priest or rabbi, but more the equivalent of an elder. These guys took care of some of the administrative duties surrounding a synagogue, such as supervising the worship and making sure the synagogue building was maintained; essentially all synagogue operations would have come under his charge. As a result, he would have been seen by the people as somebody to hold in great respect. Now nowhere in the gospels are we told exactly where Jesus came ashore but, if this was near Capernaum,

which had a very well-known synagogue, then this particular guy may have been very familiar with what Jesus was capable of doing.

Now both Mark and Luke identify this synagogue leader as a man named Jairus, a name that means “may Yahweh awaken or enlighten.” This really personalizes the story, telling us of a very specific guy who came to Jesus with an overwhelming burden. But, in presenting what is most basically the central theme of this story, all three gospel accounts really come together in their relating this incident which underscores some very important points:

- 1) According to Matthew, Jairus “knelt” before Jesus, while both Mark and Luke tell us that Jairus “fell” at Christ’s feet, all three accounts giving us the picture of a man, a father who, in seeing Jesus, came to Him with a profound sense of humility, submission and respect — the posture that one would expect in the presence of a king — as well as an urgent desperation, suggested from Mark and Luke’s accounts with the same word — “pleading.” The Greek tells us that there was an anxiousness in this man that was literally straining in his desire that Jesus understood his request — and why not: The life of his little girl, his only daughter, was at stake.
- 2) But also notice the complete certainty that this man expresses in knowing what Jesus coming to his daughter will accomplish: According to Matthew (who condensed the story presented far more in depth by Mark and Luke), if Christ places His hand on her, “she will live.” And Mark declares that same faith, that, if Jesus comes to his house and just places His hands on her, “she will be healed.” Jairus expresses no doubt as to the outcome of Christ’s visit.
- 3) It is also a remarkable encounter in that the religious establishment (meaning the scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem) had become quite public in their opposition to Jesus, which assumes to some degree that anybody connected to a synagogue in any official capacity would likewise be reflecting that bias. But if Jairus had any such feelings, his passion for his daughter blew past any other concerns.

So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around Him — Mark 5:24. An awful lot of Christ’s ministry was conducted with this backdrop: large crowds, and people pressing around Him. We know this from a couple of previous stories: One time, Jesus had to get in a boat and push off from shore just to be able to preach and teach without being pushed by that crowd right into the water. And another time, the press of the crowd was so immediate and strong that He and His disciples couldn’t even sit down and have a meal in a house. Well, in this moment, Mark tells us that this crowd is literally, according to the Greek, crowding and even compressing Him on all sides. Luke confirms Mark’s account even more strongly: ***As Jesus was on His way, the crowds almost crushed Him — Luke 8:42b***, the Greek telling us that this crowd was literally choking Him, strangling Him, drowning Him while He was just trying to get from Point A to Point B. Being Jesus of Nazareth was really hard work. But then, just in the middle of this “compression crowd” chaos, another story inserts itself.

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 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. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched His cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering — Mark 5:25-29.

This poor woman had been suffering with a bleeding condition that had been ongoing for a dozen years. Just think about that! Now while it obviously was not such a loss of blood as to put her life at risk, there were still profound implications for her. Most important, according to Mosaic law (Leviticus 15:25-33), she would have been declared ritually unclean for as long as her bleeding persisted. Because she would also make anything she touched unclean as well, this woman had likely been shunned both spiritually and socially for the entirety of those 12 years. A huge part of her suffering would have been the isolation from both the synagogue community as well as from her hometown that she would have had to endure. And with no one able to help her, her suffering had no end in sight.

But then she hears about this Nazarene — some kind of miracle man who supposedly can cure anything. And the more she hears about Him, the more she becomes assured in her heart that Jesus is the real deal, and thus is the only one who can help her. But beyond that, the more she hears about His incredible power, the more she becomes convinced that, “Even if I just touch His clothes, I will be healed.” Again, hear that marvelous faith statement: ***“If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed.”*** If this — touching Christ’s clothes — is done, then the result — Christ healing me — will happen. And the emphasis is not on what she is doing by herself, but rather what will be done when the person of Jesus enters the picture.

Next comes a bit of comic relief. Now the Bible is not known for its comedy; there are not a lot of times when something I’m reading in the Bible makes me laugh. But this is one of those times: ***At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched My clothes?” “You see the people crowding against You,” His disciples answered, “and yet You can ask, ‘Who touched Me?’” But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it — Mark 5:30-32.***

Remember how that crowd’s interaction with Christ was described before? People literally crowding and even compressing Him on all sides, this crowd literally choking Him, strangling Him, drowning Him they were so completely and closely surrounding Him, all while He was just trying to get somewhere. And in that environment, people hanging on His shoulders like so many shirts, suits and overcoats, Jesus asks, “Who touched Me?”

The disciples are dumbfounded; there may have even been a chuckle or two: “Jesus, are you kidding? You’re in the middle of swimming across a river, and now You’re asking, ‘Hey, who got me wet?’” Luke writes of this also, and refers to Peter basically saying, “Master, no disrespect intended, but this crowd is hanging on You like wool on a sheep. How in the world can You even ask such a crazy thing?”

But Jesus is adamant: “Don’t tell Me nobody’s touched Me; I know when somebody’s touched Me.” And then He explains why, in this mass of humanity, a very individual touch connected with Him: **“I know that power has gone out from Me” — Jesus Christ, Luke 8:46b.** Now this is not meant to imply that Jesus has no control over His power but rather to call out the person who expressed such a faith in who He was and what He could do. Jesus always completely knew what was happening here.

And sure enough, the “culprit” shows herself (and we’ll actually let Luke tell this portion of the story): **Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at His feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly healed — Luke 8:47.**

Couple of things going on here: First of all, instead of being able to keep her “secret” of what she had done private and unknown, she’s been found out in front of a large crowd; that alone can put the “tremble” in people. Second, she is now in the direct presence of arguably the most famous person there was in Palestine at that time. And third, nobody knew better than her that a person declared unclean in the eyes of the Mosaic law should have no contact with anybody. She is likely in great fear of what touching Christ’s clothes, even if just the edge of His garment, might mean for her.

But instead Jesus, who was unafraid of any kind of human uncleanness anyway, gave her what must have been a profoundly relieving assurance: **“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering” — Jesus Christ, Mark 5:34.**

Can you imagine the joy this woman must have experienced in that moment, knowing that over a decade of suffering was finally over; in fact, in the Greek, Jesus is telling her that her faith — her absolute, total confidence in Christ and Christ alone — has made her “whole.” She is complete and restored. And think of the “new life” that could now be starting for her. Instead of the sorrows and struggles of illness and separation that must have kept hitting her on all sides, Jesus tells her that she can now live “in peace” — meaning in quietness and rest. Wow; what a difference! This “Radical Rabbi” had proven Himself completely worthy of such a faith as hers.

But, in the meantime, it’s almost easy to forget that, while all this is going on, there is a dad desperately trying to get Jesus to his home, who must have been growing more anxious and restless by the moment. His daughter was dying and, now because of this woman with her problem, Jesus had been delayed. He might have even been fighting the temptation to look at Christ and say, “Hey, Jesus; remember me?” And just as he is wondering if Jesus is going to get there in time, the worst possible news for any parent breaks into the moment: **While Jesus was still speaking [to the woman], some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?” — Mark 5:35.** But while Jairus and those accompanying him are now confronted with the terrible pain of this announcement and their apparent failure to bring his little girl the help she needed, Jesus Himself seems rather unconcerned about it all: **Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe” — Mark 5:36.** Why? Luke’s account gives a tantalizing hint of what is to

come, according to Christ: “[S]he will be healed” — *Jesus Christ, Luke 8:50b*. And don’t forget: Jairus has just had a living, breathing example of what faith in Jesus looked like, and what faith in Jesus could do. Oh, the amazing grace of God — providing not only a wonderful healing but also a lesson of faith, precisely given to a dad who desperately needs to understand that very lesson. And by the way, from this point on, He separated Himself from the other disciples, taking only Peter and the brothers James and John with Him.

When they arrived at Jairus’ house, more chaos was there to meet him: *When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly — Mark 5:38*. Matthew adds that there was a *noisy crowd and people playing pipes — Matthew 9:23b*, while Luke tells us that *all the people were wailing and mourning for her — Luke 8:52a*. Now it was the custom in those days that families in mourning might hire professional mourners whose job it was to literally cry and wail to promote the great sadness that a bereaved family was feeling. These professionals often included instrumentalists who would play music reflecting that sadness and pain. Since this was occurring so quickly after the girl’s death, all of this noise and commotion may have been provided by family members or close friends who were already present.

Anyway, Jesus and His three disciples arrive. Surveying this chaotic scene, Jesus quickly takes command: *He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep” — Mark 5:39*. While Luke reports similar words — *“Stop wailing,” Jesus said. “She is not dead but asleep” — Luke 8:52b* — you get a sense of Jesus’ frustration with what He was seeing by what Matthew tells us Jesus said: *“Go away” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 9:24a*. You see, for Jesus, the creator of life alongside His Father, raising somebody from the dead was no more difficult than rousing somebody from sleep. He knew His power.

Now all three gospel accounts tell us with pretty much the same words the initial response of these mourners to Jesus’ words; Luke’s account says it best: *They laughed at Him, knowing that she was dead — Luke 8:53*. In the Greek, however, the wording is the same in all three gospels: “They laughed Him to scorn” — in other words, this was not the laughing response to a stand-up comic. This was a ridiculing laughter that said: “Hey, Jesus; we’ve seen her; you haven’t. She’s dead, and you’re an idiot.” But Christ was undeterred. You see, He was about to do something that had nothing to do with mourning or wailing or sadness or crying. Such displays were about to be completely out of place, and totally unnecessary.

So, what happens next? Well, Mark tells us: *After He put them (the mourners) all out, He took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with Him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat — Mark 5:40b-43*. Death had been conquered by life — by Christ’s life.

But despite Christ's orders to, as Luke says, ***not to tell anyone what had happened*** — ***Luke 8:56b***, unfortunately, as Matthew confirms: ***News of this spread through all that region*** — ***Matthew 9:26***. Why would Jesus want such a magnificent deed to be kept quiet? His power was meant to underscore the power of His words, all of which was meant to identify Him as the promised Messiah. But seeing Jesus as a miracle worker would distract people from seeing His true identity and purpose which would only be shown when He obediently allowed Himself to be sacrificed on the cross. While He certainly blessed people in this life, His purpose was to save people for eternal life. As He would later pray to His Father following the Last Supper: ***“Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent”*** — ***Jesus Christ, John 17:3***. As He would later tell His disciples after His resurrection, the purpose of His life was that: ***“The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Luke 24:46-47***. And one of the witnesses of that day — the disciple John — would later write: ***[T]his is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life*** — ***I John 5:11-13***. That's what Christ was emphasizing. And think about it: As great as these moments truly are, eventually, likely years later but at some point in time, this little 12-year-old girl actually did pass away. So did the son of the widow of Nain. So did Lazarus — and everyone else that Jesus ever brought back to life. You see, it wasn't earthly life that was Christ's focus. There was something else that Jesus was wanting to give to the world. Jesus was here to provide something that would last — forever.

APPLICATION

What a wonderful day in the life of Christ's earthly ministry. I can't imagine what it would have been like to witness all of this. And it is a brilliant reminder that, as Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: ***The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*** — ***Paul, I Corinthians 15:56-57***. We certainly saw a victory over death today — as well as a victory over sickness. I can't imagine the joy that was experienced in all those affected lives.

But there is something else at play here, and that's really what I want to focus on in our application this morning, and it's this: During the entire length of Christ's earthly ministry, He was completely aware that, in a very short time, His disciples would be doing ministry without His physical presence. So, what He is doing during these three plus years of ministry is giving them faith stories — moments that they can wrap their heads and hearts around because they witnessed them. It's what John said: ***That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched*** — ***this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard*** — ***I John 1:1-3a***. It's what Peter said: ***For we did not follow***

cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty — II Peter 1:16. The moment that all His disciples saw — the woman healed from her bleeding condition — and the moment that Peter, James and John saw — the raising of Jairus' 12-year-old daughter from the dead — were designed to provide them with faith stories, that through the witness of what they had seen and heard and experienced they could be greatly encouraged in the role of being Christ's ambassadors for which they were intended.

Well now it's some 2,000 years later and, while Christ is still not physically present with us, our role in God's kingdom has remained the same as how Paul described it, that ***[God] has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us — Paul, II Corinthians 5:19b-20a.*** While we represent many different occupations, those are merely the platforms through which we perform our duties as ambassadors for God through Jesus Christ.

So, all that brings me to the central idea of today's message: What have you been telling people as God's ambassador? Put another way, what is your faith story? Have you ever thought about that? When was the last time you had a chance to share your faith story? Have you ever written it down and practiced it with somebody close to you? It's the most important story you'll ever have to share because it's the one story that makes the faith we claim relevant and contemporary and personal.

I have something I'd like you all to do for me — in three different ways:

- 1) I would like you to write out your faith story — that story of how you, in a moment in conscious time, had your life surrendered to God through Jesus Christ. How did it happen? What led up to that moment? And how has being surrendered to God through Christ changed you? How are you different than you were before becoming a Christian? Then practice telling that story, with your family members at home, and with your church family right here. The more you practice, the more comfortable you'll be when the opportunity presents itself.
- 2) I would like you to write out God's work story — how He's been showing Himself in you, and around you, today, or this week, or this month. God is constantly at work, so what has that looked like for you? If God is truly about relationship, how has He been working within your relationship? How have you seen Him in your life? How have you seen Him working through your prayers, your devotions, your church family, life circumstances, and so on? Again, practice with your home family and church family.
- 3) I would like you to write out your anchor story. There used to be a means of witnessing that became quite cliché but still holds out as truth: If you were to die tonight, where would you be spending eternity? If it is true that, as Paul wrote, ***[F]aith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God — Paul, Romans 10:17 (NKJV)***, what verse of God's word have you heard that gives your faith the assurance that your eternity will be spent in the personal presence of God? If you were to ask this question to somebody, and they turned it around to ask you,

“Forget me; how do you know where you’d be spending eternity,” what would you tell them?

I’m not going to be checking to see if you all have done this but, between yourselves and God, I think it’s terribly important that these faith stories be addressed, and practiced so that, when God presents an open door, you’re ready to answer it.

CONCLUSION

As we close, I’ve mentioned it before but, twice over the last few weeks, I’ve heard this comment from local and national leaders. President Biden, in addressing gun violence, said, “Our hearts need to change.” A community activist in Minneapolis said just over a week ago, “Our hearts need to be changed.” Folks, that’s the world making a spiritual 9-1-1 call — and God is the dispatcher. That makes us the dispatched ones, the EMSs — emergency ministry services — that are going to answer that call. Is our church ready to answer when our Dispatcher calls?

You see, in a very few weeks, we are going to have opportunities to share our faith in north Minneapolis, on the east side of St. Paul, and here in Redwood through our “Praise In The Park” efforts. We’re doing all that for one simple reason — people need the Lord. And one way to connect them to that truth is to let them know how we needed the Lord, and how God’s salvation saved us and made “something beautiful of our lives.” Are you ready to answer the call? Let’s pray!