

# Jesus' 'Questionable' Concern amidst Chaos

Message #1 in the series "In the Middle of Chaos"

Mark 5:21-34

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
September 12, 2021

**Pastor John Marcott**

*<sup>21</sup> 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.*

*<sup>22</sup> Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. <sup>23</sup> 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." <sup>24</sup> So Jesus went with him.*

*A large crowd followed and pressed around him.*

**(Mark 5:21-24)**

Consider these: Have you ever squeezed in among a standing-room-only playoff game? Have you ever stood among hundreds of others at a general admission concert? Have you ever stood at the beginning of a marathon surrounded by wall-to-wall people waiting for the starter's pistol to go off? Ever been part of a march or protest when more than expected participants showed up? In each of those scenarios, there is a mix of excitement and anticipation – there might even be a little sense of danger as your personal-space and safety are not completely under your control. There's energy in the mix, but there are also uncomfortable and undesirable aspects to the excitement, too. This must have approximated what it felt-like physically to be among the crowds that surrounded Jesus, the popular healer, teacher, exorcist who burst on the scene in first century Palestine....for Jesus was never far from the madding crowd.<sup>1</sup>

So much of Jesus' ministry took place in the midst of crowds - not the quiet, controlled environment of a lecture hall or a Sunday School class. Our passage begins with a mention of the crowds surrounding Jesus and then repeats that fact just a few lines later. We read,

*"...a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake."*

Then later,

*"So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him...**(Mark 5:21,24)***

---

<sup>1</sup> The title of Thomas Hardy's most successful novel written in 1874. Hardy took the title from Thomas Gray's poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", 1751

I highlight this backdrop because I think that the randomness, the swirl of people, forces, opinions, activities - the very 'chaotic' nature of the crowd is a good metaphor for what we've become used to as the backdrop to our own lives these days. Living today, the headlines might change day-to-day in detail but we're subjected to a variety of currents swirling around our lives: inflation, the turmoil surrounding withdrawal in Afghanistan, the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake, hurricanes, flooding, wildfires and air quality out west, COVID case numbers surging, individual freedoms, government mandates....we all live in the middle of this whirlwind of issues, concerns, realities.....and yet we have to wake up each day, maybe make breakfast for others depending on us, take a shower, get dressed, put one foot in front of the other.....we need to live our lives amidst the swirling chaos we call life...."Too much information running round my brain, too much information driving me insane..."<sup>2</sup> We're crowded by issues, by concerns, by thoughts and emotions.....

Let's join Jesus as he makes his way among the crowds....

<sup>22</sup> *Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came...." (Mark 5:22)*

Now, I suspect that the synagogue leader stuck out a bit in this crowd. Of course, we do not know for sure the precise make-up of the crowds that followed Jesus, but I wonder if this synagogue leader - who was a community leader, one with authority, stature, and responsibility would have stuck out a bit by his clothing and his demeanor. He may have been well-known in the community and highly regarded. People may have even stepped aside and made way for him to gain access to Jesus as he approached. Everyone was clamoring around to get close to Jesus, but the crowd may have parted for him, allowing the VIP to have access to the celebrity, Jesus.

Did the crowd step back, expecting a fight? Did they brace themselves for a confrontation? The Jewish religious leaders (including synagogue officials) have not only been critical of Jesus, but their official pronouncement about his ministry has been that he is in cahoots with the Devil! "*He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out demons,*" declared the Jerusalem representatives (Mark 3:22). Jesus has gained the reputation for disregarding the very things that the religious establishment highly prized. He associated with bad company, he ate with flagrant sinners, and he even called them to follow him! (Mark 2:13-17). He didn't train his followers thoroughly, at least not by their standards! His followers didn't fast nor keep their time-honored customs. In their estimation, he ran a messy, undisciplined rag-tag group of followers (Mark 2:18-28). Will this religiously scrupulous synagogue leader challenge him?

Well, all those questions disappear immediately by his approach:

<sup>22</sup> *...Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, **he fell at his feet.** <sup>23</sup> **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)*

---

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Sumner, "Too Much Information," Ghost in the Machine, 1981.

Contrary to the Jerusalem elite who looked down their noses at Jesus, dismissing his ministry of exorcism, healing, and authoritative teaching – this synagogue leader humbly bows before Jesus, acknowledges Jesus' authority and assumes the position of a beggar in great need before him. Desperate for his daughter's life, he pleads for Jesus' attention.

*24 So Jesus went with him. (Mark 5:24)*

It's so tempting to take this verse for granted. A father comes with a need and Jesus responds. Well, of course, that's what Jesus does, right? Well, what about the rich young ruler – who should be known as the 'Moral Rich Young Ruler' who never broke any commandments. Jesus tells him he lacks something...which discourages him from eventually following Jesus. And, what about the would-be follower who wants to bury his parents first? Jesus refuses this man's offer to follow only after he settles family matters (which could take years).

Jesus never turns away from those desperate, whole-hearted seekers. How many of us thank God for situations that level us – that make us desperate, humble us, make us so aware of our need that we can taste it? When we become so aware of our need that it out-weighs everything else? It's only after such a situation that you find Jesus. Jesus doesn't hold a man's past against him, as long as he is humbled, destitute, poor.... *"Blessed are the destitute...for theirs is the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 5:3).....thank God for situations that force you to turn to Jesus because you've come to the end of yourself. This man's desperation enabled him to look past the prejudices of his peers and turn to Jesus.

### **Thank God for bringing you to the point of desperation.**

The situation is urgent, no time to spare in small talk. The Greek phrase the father uses, "**eschatos echei**" literally means "has finality" and is a colloquialism for "at death's door," or "sinking fast." Jesus senses the father's urgency and turns immediately to follow him.

Now, if Jesus and Jairus had separated from the crowd and made a b-line to his house, we'd be talking about what happened once they arrived at Jairus's house. However, crowds followed.

*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. (Mark 5:24-29)*

Crowds followed. And, in the crowd was someone with her own issues. However, and this is important to notice - what transpires with the woman **happens without anyone's notice.**

- She doesn't approach Jesus;

- She doesn't explain her plight to Jesus;
- Jesus doesn't acknowledge, listen and then respond to her.

No, her miracle happens without anyone's notice, and quite literally, behind Jesus' back. Remember, the synagogue leader's daughter is dying and there is no time to lose.

So, what's Jesus to do? As we read this story, we might think, "Jesus stay the course. This is a synagogue leader. The religious establishment has turned on you, and accused you, branded you as a false teacher, Satan's agent, and here's one who believes in you. This situation could dramatically change how Jewish leaders react to you and your ministry. This could be huge! What's more, this is urgent! The woman got she wanted, let's keep moving." But here's how the story unfolds:

*<sup>30</sup> At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" (Mark 5:30)*

Jesus calls attention to the unsolicited touch. Jesus senses power: he knows a miracle has occurred, but he's missed seeing who has been healed. Jesus' abrupt stop and open-ended question simultaneously

- SURPRISED the disciples: they're out of touch with what he felt,
- SHOCKED THE WOMAN: she came unnoticed and wanted to stay unnoticed
- DISAPPOINTED Jairus: the last thing he wanted was an interruption or delay

The disciples' reaction is heavy with incredulity bordering on annoyance:

*<sup>31</sup> "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" (Mark 5:31)*

Basically, the disciples reply, "Jesus, you're surrounded by pressing crowds – it would have better to ask, "**Who HASN'T touched me?!**" When my children were really young, they loved the pool, but whenever they'd jump into the pool, (this was one of those blow-up 1 foot-deep pools) they'd yell to me in a panic with their eyes closed, "My face is wet, my face is wet" and expect me to run over with a towel and wipe their faces. If I didn't respond quickly enough they'd walk toward me 'Frankenstein-like' arms out straight feeling for me, with their eyes shut tightly till I wiped their faces. I tried explaining to them that when you jump in a pool, your faces will get wet: that's part of the experience! But each time, it was like a new, surprising, unexpected, unpleasant occurrence they'd go through that I'd have to remedy by wiping their faces dry before they could open their eyes again. This captures the exasperation of the disciples – "You're in a crowd; of course, people are going to touch you!" But, it shows how 'out of touch' the disciples were in questioning the legitimate question of Jesus, and assuming how ridiculous his question was.

As ridiculous as his **question** was – the **answer** was both more disappointing and shocking. First of all, the 'identity reveal' was an enormous let-down. To put it bluntly: **In their minds, this simply wasn't a person worth the delay!** This was not someone important enough to postpone the synagogue leader's concern. The person Jesus halted his urgent visit for couldn't have been more opposite the synagogue leader.

- This was a woman, not a man (and in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine they simply were not considered equal);
- She was a poor woman, not a well-to-do man;
- She was an outcast, not a prized and respected contributing member of society; and
- She was unclean, her condition rendered her unfit for worship; not a ritually pure, scrupulous law-abider who led worship!

Did Jesus just jeopardize his 'great catch'? Did he scare away his 'prize fish'? When this woman reveals her identity and explains her story, the crowd may have drawn back a step.....but not out of deference to a VIP like before. This time they'd step away out of fear of themselves being rendered unclean. In that culture, a ritually unclean woman was not supposed to travel among society but keep herself quarantined. Her condition wasn't contagious, but her uncleanness would render all who came in contact with her also unclean and unfit for worship. Did she just make them all unclean? Did she just contaminate Jesus? Would Jairus step back?

Once she identifies herself, the disciples may have found his concern even more ridiculous! Why waste time on such a comparatively worthless person? And, why waste precious time when the synagogue leaders pressing problem is so urgent?

Why did Jesus stop? She got what she wanted, and she would have preferred to slip away unnoticed. **But her remedy was less than what Jesus wanted for her**, which was a relationship. A relationship where she was known, acknowledged and treasured – and a relationship in which Jesus is understood. His stopping gave her value equivalent to how a man was treated, equivalent to someone well-to-do and worthy of respect, equivalent to an important, contributing member of society, equivalent to a ritually clean individual.

**God's dispensing good gifts like healing  
is topped by his desire to dispense Himself!**

**God welcomes everyone no matter what your state or status.**

Okay, you might think of course we know that God is 'no respecter of persons.' We all know this, but I want us to catch ourselves – when someone approaches you, do you ever size them up based on appearance, physique, style, apparel? We know we're not supposed to do this, but instinctively we all do.

But, this not only applies to how we assess others – how about how we assess ourselves? Do we sometimes feel we're not in 'spiritual shape' to approach God? Jesus welcomes the well-dressed, respectable synagogue leader who is humble and desperate, and he welcomes the poorly dressed, destitute woman who is humble and desperate. Remember, he looks not on the outward appearance as humans do, but on the heart.

**From the depths of desperation look up to your Helper in faith.**

Desperation is great, but all too often we can wallow in the catharsis of loss, admitting need. Faith/trust is a personal connection with God, the life source. God does not simply bless us with forgiveness, healing, He the Blessor who welcomes us into his company – and in his presence is fullness of joy. When we meet Jesus we don't just receive a straight A report card, a 'clean bill of health' we receive Him who is wisdom, righteousness, life itself. God is close to the broken-hearted. This woman's private hell was dear to God's heart. Desperation prompts us to realize our need, realize our helplessness, and prompts us to reach out for help.

*<sup>32</sup> And he looked around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." (Mark 5:32-34)*

### **From the depths of desperation look up to your Helper in faith.**

Faith looks up from that position of desperation to our help. Desperation makes us embrace our need. Faith embraces Jesus who more than meets our need. Faith raises us and connects us to our Helper.

Faith is what connects us but we always long for something more tangible. Listen to Jesus' correction to the woman's 'magical' assumption: "*if I only touch his clothes I'll be healed,*" it is not merely touching me that effected your healing, "*your faith has made you well.*" The church subsequently forgot this with the proliferation of relics, splinters from the cross, saints' garments, etc. Today we often seek after visions or emotions that confirm God's presence, but it is faith that connects us to Jesus.

### **Thank God for bringing us to the point of desperation.**

### **From the depths of desperation look up to your Helper in faith.**

**God's dispensing good gifts like healing  
is topped by his desire to dispense Himself!**

### **God welcomes everyone no matter what your state or status.**

Jesus' ridiculous question becomes all the more pronounced when the messengers arrive with bad news of the daughter's death following his delay.....(but that's next week's message). *Stay tuned.....*