

### Introduction

*When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea.*  
(Mark 5:21)

One day a man was walking along the beach, when he noticed a boy hurriedly picking up and throwing things into the sea. Approaching the boy he asked, "Young man, what are you doing?" The boy replied, "Throwing starfish back into the sea. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die." The man laughed to himself and said, "Don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds and hundreds of starfish? You can't make a difference!" After listening politely, the young boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, "I made a difference to that one!" (adapted from *The Star Thrower* by Loren Eiseley, various sources including odb.org, rwc4reading.com)

Jesus never let the vast crowds discourage Him from helping individuals. In our Gospel reading from Mark we read that a multitude pressed about Him, yet Jesus focussed on two individuals out of the massive crowd who desperately needed Him.

(Parts of the following explanation of a narrative sandwich attributed to Rev. Dr. Lewis Galloway, *Taking Jesus Seriously*, 2012)

In today's Gospel reading Mark brings their two stories together by inserting one into the story of the other. It is a kind of *narrative sandwich*.

The top and bottom of our Gospel sandwich is the story of the little girl; the inside is the story of the healing of the bleeding woman. These individuals had little in common, other than a great need for Jesus to intervene in their life.

It begins with a desperate father, a leader of the synagogue, pleading with Jesus to come to his home and heal his critically ill daughter. His story is interrupted by the desperate act of a *niddah* (Hebrew) or *Haemorrhissa* (New Testament Greek) ~ a ceremonially unclean woman.

Who were these individuals in our Gospel sandwich?

One was a man, the other a woman; one wealthy, one poor; one respected, one rejected; one honoured, one ignored; one a leader, one a social and religious outcast; one had a twelve year old daughter who was sick; the other had been sick for twelve years.

Jesus took time to minister to one woman and a young girl.

The top and bottom of our Gospel sandwich is the story of the little girl; the inside is the story of the healing of the bleeding woman who has tried every cure but found no relief until she meets Jesus.

Both stories are gripping and moving, dealing as they do with people in extreme circumstances. The woman has a painful, debilitating illness that isolates her from the community because it is considered as making her *unclean*. She believes that, just by touching the hem of his garment, Jesus would cure her and he does through her *touch of faith*.

"Not only was she physically healed, but she was also healed socially, psychologically and spiritually. By revealing in public what happened to her Jesus is making it publicly known that she has been healed...Jesus has completely changed her life." (frtommylane.com)

Jairus' daughter, by the time Jesus reaches her, is already dead. But with God all things are possible and he restores her to life. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means "Little girl, get up!" (v 41)

In both of these stories, Jesus' followers expressed disbelief, and at Jairus' house the mourners laughed in his face. They lacked faith in Jesus's healing touch, but Jairus didn't. He trusted Jesus who gave him an extraordinary gift, that of lasting hope and saving faith.

Our Gospel sandwich teaches one big lesson ~ that the most crucial element of our life is *faith*.

To the woman he says: "Daughter, your faith has made you well." And to Jairus: "Do not fear, only believe."

Did you feel the emotion in these stories? Did you identify with either the woman or the father or both? Mark invited us to participate in their desperate situations and in doing so, we felt their suffering but also their hope.

When you read Mark's account you can feel the pity for both the woman and for the synagogue official, Jairus. Jesus is open to the needs of a child, to the prayer of a humble woman. To Jesus it didn't matter your background, your social standing, how rich or poor you were, or anything else. Jesus, He loved the world and everyone in it.

How many of us reached a point in our lives when we finally awoke to the fact that we needed help? That we couldn't solve our own problems? That we couldn't fix whatever it was eating away at our life? That we finally hit that brick wall? That we finally realized we needed Jesus? That it was time to fall on our knees, and open ourselves to vulnerability, and, in doing so, open ourselves to faith and touching Jesus.

The healing power of Jesus is within us. It is a matter of faith. For the two people in today's gospel they also had faith, a desperate faith.

**Desperate times call for desperate measures.\*** Both the woman and Jairus were desperately asking Jesus to help them. A touch of the hem of his garment, a father pleading for the healing of his daughter.

There are so many who have this desperate hope, this desperate need of healing, this desperate faith.

English Author G.K. Chesterton said, "Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless." (quotezine.com)

"Jesus enters our lives in our hopeless moments and brings us hope. He comes with his healing power when no healing is possible. Sometimes he works the miracle of physical healing, and sometimes he works the miracle of spiritual healing. He may not always come when we want him to come, and he might not always answer our prayers the way we want him to, but we must always be faithful and know that he will help us. Faith is the belief that God will do what it right." (sermonsfrommyheart.blog.2012, author anonymous)

Just like the desperate woman who stretched out her hand in faith, and just like the desperate father pleading for Jesus' to heal his daughter, we desperately hope for an end to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have experienced waiting that has felt endless, sometimes unbearable, longing to physically connect with family and friends, situations beyond our control. We have endured months of social isolation, but we have hope. The end of the pandemic is in sight: cases have declined dramatically, vaccinations are being administered at an accelerated rate, and our province is gradually opening up.

Dan and I experienced the joy of celebrating our grandson Wyatt's first birthday last Saturday with family in Oshawa. What a blessing!

We are on the cusp of returning to pre-pandemic life and we are slowly healing. The events in our Gospel reading occurred for the benefit of those involved. But they also occurred for our benefit. Jesus invites us to keep reaching for Him, to trust Him and never give up hope, and to believe He is always able, always trustworthy, and always within reach.

In closing, I would like to focus on the woman in our Gospel sandwich.

"If I could just touch the hem of His garment, I know I'll be made whole." (Sam Cooke, *Touch The Hem Of His Garment* lyrics)

It would have been easy for her to be bitter about being sick for so long, let alone spending all she had without any positive results. It would also have been easy for her to be bitter about being an outcast because Jewish law declared that she was unclean.

The law was set up to keep society healthy and stop the spread of disease, but it also isolated her from others as well as made it unlawful for her to enter the synagogue and temple.

But the good news is, the woman did not give up, but kept hoping that God would heal her. Along the same lines we also need to know that God will never allow us to go where His grace cannot keep us if we keep trusting Him. Such a believer was Sir John Simpson.

(A story to share)

*Sir John Simpson was a British architect who specialized in designing public memorials and buildings, as well as hospitals and schools. He also designed the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum (1893), and his most famous work was the Empire Exhibition buildings at Wembley (1925), including the original Wembley Stadium (opened 1923) for which he was knighted in 1924.*

*Sir John Simpson was a devoted Christian. When he was dying, a friend came to see him, and said to him, "Sir John, when you see Jesus, you will be privileged to lay your head upon his breast."*

*And Sir John Simpson replied, "My friend, I am not worthy to lay my head upon His breast, but I look forward soon to touch the hem of his garment."* (adapted from W.A. Criswell, *The Hem of His Garment*, December 9, 1990)

*Amen*

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\*Derived from the proverb, *Desperate diseases must have desperate remedies*, and originally ascribed to the ancient Greek physician, Hippocrates, in his work *Amorphisms*.