

“Broken, But Not Dead”

Based on Mark 5:21-43

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What was your life like 12 years ago? It was 2006. In that year, there was an earthquake in Indonesia that killed 6,600 people; Julian Assange started WikiLeaks; North Korea conducted its first nuclear test; and NASA revealed photographs that suggested liquid water on Mars. It was half way through George Bush’s second term. My boys were not yet teenagers. I was beginning my appointment at a church in Cincinnati. Where were you? What was your family like? Your life?

Think about all that has happened since 2006. We went through the Obama years. We endured the Great Recession and have come through on the other side for the most part. Twitter has become a primary means of communication, from pop stars to presidents. My boys are all teenagers now, with one out of high school. How has your family changed? What are some of the big events you have experienced since 2006?

I know that the length of time doesn’t change. Time doesn’t speed up or slow down. Still, it seems to me that the older I get the faster time moves. That said, 2006, 12 years ago, may seem like a long time ago for you. Then again, maybe it doesn’t seem that long ago at all. I guess it depends on your perspective.

For the woman with a hemorrhage, 12 years must have felt like a long time. Can you women even fathom having a menstrual discharge for 12 straight years? Imagine 2006 being the year this began for you, all the way up to this very day. All that lost blood. This woman must have been anemic and alarmingly underweight. Surely her bodily organs were compromised. We don’t know how old she is, but we can guess that because of her illness she has not been able to bear children. It wouldn’t be surprising if her husband has left her. But not just that, because of her condition, she would be considered ritually unclean, and thus unable to enter the Temple for worship. Any person that touched her would be ritually unclean. Anywhere she sits would be unclean. This would have

been for her not only 12 years of bodily discomfort and suffering, but also a period marked by abandonment. And to top it all off, she had spent all her money on physicians who were ineffective. In fact she was worse off than when she started going to doctors. Twelve long years of misery.

But for Jairus and his daughter, 12 years wasn't long at all. Here was his baby girl, having just made it to the critical stage in her life when she would experience her bat mitvah and become a daughter of the commandment, entering into young womanhood, and she is lying on her death bed. It is way too soon to lose your child. No parent should have to bury their own children, and especially a young child. And it's one thing to lose your child when she is a baby, or even a toddler. But 12 years is enough time to have lots of memories, to build a close relationship, to see your child grow and develop and become a young woman. To only have 12 years with your daughter and then to have her taken from you, that's not enough time. It's too soon.

Whether 12 years seemed a long time or a short time, both the woman and Jairus found themselves in a similar condition and had a few things in common: they were desperate, they believed Jesus could heal, and they would not be denied.

They were desperate. The woman with her chronic condition had tried all that medical science could provide and nothing worked. The hemorrhage had taken such a toll on her body. Her social isolation must have been unbearable. Surely she can't take this much longer. She is desperate to be healed. Jairus, about to lose his daughter to death, is desperate. He doesn't want to lose his daughter. But he is running out of time. It may already be too late. He needed his daughter healed right now.

They believed that Jesus could heal. The woman had heard about Jesus, about his healing power. She had tried everything else and nothing worked. Maybe Jesus could heal her. She had to make her way to Jesus, to put herself in his path and hope that she can get her healing. Jairus had also heard about Jesus' power to heal. Sure, he taught some things that got him in trouble with some of his fellow religious leaders. He sometimes rubbed his colleagues the wrong way. But he also could

heal. Raise someone from the dead? Doubtful. But maybe he could get to his daughter in time before she perished. Jesus was his only hope.

They would not be denied. Jesus and his disciples were surrounded by a crowd and they were in a tight space. Everyone was pushing and shoving as they were making their way. But the crowd parted a little bit as Jairus himself approached Jesus and fell at his feet. He would not send one of his people to get Jesus' attention. No, Jairus had to go himself. He would use the full weight of his prestige in a public display to plead for Jesus to come heal his daughter. He got Jesus' attention and Jesus agreed to go with him. So the crowd begins to make its way toward Jairus' house, moving along as fast as possible because they knew that time was not on their side. The girl could die any minute. They had to hurry.

Jairus used his privilege as a religious leader to get the crowd to part a little so he could get in front of Jesus and let him know about his emergency. But the woman with the hemorrhage had no such privilege. If she was going to get to Jesus, she would have to push her way through a crowd that was moving away from her. But she would not be denied. She pushed and shoved her way toward the back of Jesus, making each person she touched ritually impure without them knowing it probably. Her relentless pursuit gets her close enough that she can reach out her hand to touch the fringe of Jesus' cloak. And that was enough. Healing energy flowed from Jesus into the woman's body and she could feel from her inside that she was healed. Jesus didn't even know she was pursuing her. He only knew something powerful had happened because he felt it, not the tug of his cloak, for he was being pushed about in the crowd. It was the energy that went out of him. He knew he had healed someone without knowing who he healed. Jesus had to hold everything, in spite of the clock ticking on the life of Jairus' daughter, to find out who he had healed. Falling on her knees before Jesus, the woman had the floor, proclaiming before everyone what Jesus had done for her. Her public witness ended her 12 years of suffering and social isolation. She was not only healed of her blood flow, but also able to reclaim her place in the community she had lost all those years ago.

Now, admittedly, these two healing miracles are just that: miracles. They were uniquely possible because of the physical presence of Jesus. There are many people in the world today who have just as much faith as this woman and Jairus who in similar circumstances do not receive a dramatic and instant healing or have their daughter brought back to life. I do not say that miracles such as these never happen. I believe miracles do happen and anything is possible. But miracles can't be counted on, nor can miracles be the foundation of our faith and hope. We must not be naïve and sentimental about how healing works with Jesus. Not everyone with faith experiences physical healing. Tragedy is something that people of faith can experience. Not every story has a happy ending. And, of course, we will all die no matter how much faith we have in Jesus to heal. These stories of healing we hear about this morning are not so much about the faith of the woman and of Jairus, although that is part of it. They both had faith Jesus could heal and were desperate enough to have that faith because they saw no other option. But these healing miracles are more about revealing who Jesus is as the Son of God. They testify to his power. It's just naïve to think that all you have to do is have faith that Jesus can heal you and that's that. Not everyone with faith gets healed. Young people die, no matter how much faith in Jesus their parents might have.

Still, there is something we can take from these miracles that can serve us through times of suffering and death, either the death of someone we love, the deaths of strangers in newsrooms or high school campuses, or any other tragedies we experience. When Jairus was told that his daughter had died, Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, only believe." There's power in that. Jairus was given factual information. His daughter was dead. But the subtext of that statement, the narrative behind it, was "Jesus can't help you now. It's hopeless." It's that narrative that Jesus came into this world to refute. See, in this life, no matter how bad things get, Jesus can *always* help us. Because of Jesus we *always* have hope. If we would but believe that to be so. It is belief, trust, faith that Jesus *is* our help in time of need, that in Jesus there *is* an abundant hope, it is this belief that gets us through the tough times. It is

this belief that even can help us heal from the hurts and cuts that life brings us.

I suspect for each one of us, in the years since 2006, some things have happened in your life that you need healed from. Maybe it is a chronic physical condition. Maybe it is a strained or broken relationship. Maybe your heart continues to hurt after the passing away of someone you dearly love. Surely over a 12 year period, something has happened to you that needs healing. I think that as we bring to mind even those points of hurt, injury, illness, brokenness, that Jesus would say to you and me, “Do not be afraid, only believe.” No quick fix. No instant healing. And maybe the healing never fully realizes in this life. But faith in Jesus *does* make it possible for you and me to keep moving forward, moving toward our own healing, if we not be afraid and believe in Jesus.

Twelve years from now will be 2030. We will be at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century. Imagine how much healing and hope will be needed for the next 12 years: not just in your own life, or that of your family, but of this nation, and of this world. As we open our eyes wider and look around us, and particularly on the body that is the United States, we find countless wounds. And we hear the cries, from street corners, detention centers, prison cells, drug houses, and sweat shops. We live in a time perhaps closing in on desperation, a time that demands of us *not* to be afraid, and to only believe in the power of Jesus to heal. This kind of faith will be required of us for the next 12 years and beyond. Friends, now is the time to believe that Jesus can heal. And then, like the woman and like Jairus, it is time to pursue Jesus, to push through the crowd and noise, the distractions, the provocateurs perpetuating hate and division and the false hopes of discredited ideology, and pursue Jesus, reach out to Jesus, touch Jesus, the one who is found among the least of these, the one who is found among the discarded and dismissed, the one who is found in the halls of power and privilege. Jesus is everywhere and is ready to bring about healing, if we but reach out and point others to his healing presence. No one is without Jesus. No one is without hope. There is so much healing work that we all need to be about doing. And I don't see it letting up any time soon.

Even as we turn to Jesus and reach out to be healed from our past, let us be encouraged that Jesus our healer will be with us in the years ahead. As long as we are alive there is hope. And even when we reach life's end on this earth, faith, hope and love endure. So we must press forward with our faith in Jesus, our hope in God, and the spirit of love working her way through all we think and do. Now is the time to persevere. I read of someone meeting her Lyft driver to go somewhere and he asked her how she was doing. She said "fine" and asked how he was doing. He said, "Broken, but not dead. Broken, but not dead." Isn't that true for all of us? We are all broken, and we live in a broken church, located in a broken city, in a broken nation on a broken world. But we are not dead. And so we live, and move, and do healing work, with hope.