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So I'll just say right now my very favorite part of this story is the last verse where he tells them, "Get her something to eat!" Isn't that great?

Mark is not a detail guy. When he throws in details they matter. And that Jesus takes the time to take care of this little girl's hunger is so sweet and I love that detail. It's a marvelous story and it's a story within a story, right?

The whole theme of today is healing and that's always a little problematic for us. We always wrestle, I think. I don't think there's one of us who hasn't prayed for healing for themselves or someone they loved. Probably isn't one of us here right now who isn't currently praying for someone they love and hoping for God's healing grace. And yet we wonder: Does God hear our prayers?

In this story, Jesus is on his way somewhere. He gets to the other side of the water and here comes this delegation and Jairus from the synagogue. Jairus is an important person. He represents the respectable people of the world. And he comes to Jesus and says, "My daughter's sick and I need your help." That takes some humility for him to do. But he trusts Jesus and he tells Jesus this is his need and Jesus says, "Well, I'll certainly be there."

So they're on their way—but there's an interruption. There's a woman who has had a bleeding problem for twelve years and the doctors have just made it worse. And she spent all her money so she's financially destitute. She's physically disabled. And she's also socially outcast because in her culture a bleeding woman has to be isolated and can't be socially around other people. Certainly cannot touch other people. So really there is no worse predicament. In the first place, she's a woman which means there are all the limitations and she cannot be married and all kinds of things. I mean, she's in the worse possible shape.

She does something incredibly gutsy. She's not supposed to be around people, let alone touch them, and the crowd has packed around Jesus so it isn't just that she touches Jesus. She has to elbow her way through the crowd to get to him. So she has to touch a whole bunch of people on her way. Imagine what determination and conviction and nerve that must take. You know, when I have been sick for a couple of days I feel disgusting. It doesn't do anything good for your self-esteem to be in pain or not well.

That this woman had the courage, after twelve years of having all of society tell her that she was utterly worthless and disgusting, that she had the courage to elbow her way through the crowd when it might even cost her very severe punishment. She did it anyway. She did it anyway because she trusted Jesus. For some reason, she trusted him powerfully.

She gets to Jesus and she touches his robe. And the scripture says Jesus notices it. And he says, "Who did that?" And the disciples say, "What do you mean who did that? There's, you know, thirty people standing around you right now. What do you mean who did it?" And he stopped.

He's on his way to do a very important thing, to help a very important man who has a very sincere problem and he *stops*. And he doesn't stop to heal the woman. She's already healed. *He stops to make connection with her*. He stops to be in relationship with her. And he speaks to her and she's waiting for punishment.

She comes on her knees to him. She throws herself at his feet. In other words, at his mercy. Because she's done a bad thing. She's rendered him unclean. She's touched him. And she's waiting for the reproof. And what does he do?

He calls her daughter. He calls her his own. And in doing so, he said something really interesting. He says, "Be healed." Now she's already healed. He says, "Your faith has made you well." And then he says, "Be healed. Of your disease."

Disease in Jesus' culture was not a specific illness. You know, in our culture we fragment everything and we get everything down to the name of the virus that's causing the symptoms we have. But in Jesus' day, disease was a whole social experience. It wasn't just, 'I have a cold.' But it was a sense of how it impacts everything around you. Her disease was not just her bleeding; her disease was her broken relationship with everyone around her and her poverty. And Jesus says *be healed of that* - so Jesus is not just healing this woman; he is healing the system.

He is healing the brokenness and the whole community that has deemed her worthless because of her illness. Jesus is undermining that whole thing and saying, "I'm not only happy that you have come and touched me, I am not only amazed at your courage, I call you my daughter and I say this nightmare is over. Your twelve years of suffering are done."

And just as he is saying these words the message comes that Jairus' daughter is dead. Jesus took the time to bless this woman at the expense of this little girl who has now died. But Jesus carries on. And he goes into Jairus' home and he takes his closest disciples and he takes the girl's parents and he goes into the room and takes the girl by the hand, it says, and helps her to stand. The tenderness of that again is touching.

Jesus is touching a corpse—another way to get unclean. Jesus reaches out, takes her hand and raises her up. And then he says, "Get her something to eat!" And he [tells] those in the room 'don't tell anybody'. And he makes light of her death. He says, "She's not dead. She's just asleep. And don't tell anybody you saw this." Because he does not want the attention to be upon the miraculous but upon the healing that has happened in the community.

So he has shown his care for the least and for the most important. He has shown his care for the leader of the synagogue and for this humble woman. He has broken down the barriers of clean and unclean on the one hand, and on the other and what he has done is touch the whole system and created a radically new sort of relationship for every rung from the bottom to the top. Jairus can no longer look down on this ill woman because his own daughter has been healed by Jesus. The whole system has been transformed.

I think often when we think about healing we think too narrowly. We think about an illness. We think about a virus. We think about a failed organ or cancer. And yet in the bigger picture of things, God is interested the healing of all things, of whole communities, of estrangement of all levels; of the emotional level, of the spiritual level, of the social level, of the political level, of the level of relationships with creation.

The whole picture is God's concern so that when we come to ask for healing and we place ourselves in that position of openness towards God, we're not asking—we may think of ourselves as asking God to remedy a particular thing but in opening ourselves up to God I think we are inviting God's presence and power to be alive and at work in ourselves first. And transforming the whole picture of human beings in relationship to God and one another.

After Richard and I had been married a couple of years, I had two miscarriages and I've been around here nine years—you've probably heard this story in one form or another but I'm going to tell it again because it's formative for me. I'd had a couple of miscarriages and I was really in trouble. Emotionally I was really a wreck. And I didn't know why. I know, it seems silly, but I didn't know why I was such a mess and having such a hard time. My prayers—I couldn't pray anymore. It was, you know, just scary to get out of bed on Sunday morning and try to preach.

And finally I got into spiritual direction and my spiritual director very wisely suggested that perhaps after two miscarriages I might be mad at God. Which resulted in a flood of tears and an awareness that truly I was. And he told me to say my prayers and I said, "I can't."

He said, "Good, that's fine. All you need to do is show up. Just show up." So I did. I did what I was told and I set a time and I sat there. "Okay, I'm here." And I did it day after day and sometimes—most times—for the first few weeks I fell asleep. Because I could not do anything else.

But time passed and as time passed God started to get to me. I mean, I thought I was doing God some sort of favor by showing up. But showing up [I] was allowing God the opportunity to connect. And slowly the barriers, the ice, the blockage began to melt away. And I was healed. I was healed and I proceeded to have two more miscarriages but I was healed. And we adopted a beautiful son for whom we are daily grateful.

The healing had to do with the opening myself to God and to the other possibilities and to the other ways in which God was at work in the world. Maybe not my agenda but maybe something bigger, something bigger that I don't necessarily understand.

I don't mean to make light of our cries to God in prayer. I do not mean to make light of people's suffering. It's truly a mystery to me why some people become sick and why some people get better, why prayers sometimes seem to be answered and why they are not.

But this is my faith: That when we place ourselves in that vulnerable relationship with God where we truly open our hearts to God and wait upon God, even if all we are is angry, even if all we are is desperate, that when we place ourselves in that awareness of God open ourselves to God that things change. Something changes. Maybe us. But maybe more than that. Maybe we're connected in ways we truly do not understand. And that when we prayerfully participate in God's presence we are opening doors for healing to happen in ways we can't imagine, but are powerful and true and transformative for the world.

Amen.