

## **“Up Close and Personal”**

**Mark 5:21-43**

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She looked to be about eight years old and was playing on the beach with her family. She was having a wonderful time doing what children do on a beach, building sandcastles and running in and out of the water.

It was easy to single her out, though, because she was wearing a pink body suit and had no hair on her head. I am confident she was taking treatment for some form of cancer, but it did not slow her down, at least while she was on the beach.

I watched her dad take her out into the waves to help her ride them. Both of them were splashing around and laughing as if they did not have a care in the world. This was probably one of the few times her illness did not consume and control her.

My daughter, Amy, said to me as we looked at her four-year-old twins, “Puts everything in perspective, doesn’t it?” “Yes, honey, it does,” I replied.

Is there anything that worries a parent more than a sick child? I don’t think so. Every parent I know would turn heaven and earth upside down to find a cure for a child who is ill.

Jairus, a leader in the synagogue somewhere near the Sea of Galilee, certainly did. He was so desperate to help his twelve-year-old daughter who was about to die that he pushed aside pride and protocol, fell to his feet in front of Jesus and begged him to come to his home and lay his hands on her.

To everyone’s surprise, Jesus agreed. Many thought he was too busy or would not consider granting the request of a Jewish leader, since many of them were already voicing opposition to his ministry. Once again, this reveals their inability to understand Jesus’ mission and purpose, which was to show mercy even to his enemies.

On his way to Jairus’ home, a woman who had struggled for twelve years with an illness slipped up behind Jesus and merely touched the hem of his garment. Immediately, she was healed, but it did not go unnoticed as she had hoped. Jesus knew someone touched him differently than all the others who were pressing up against him, so he turned around, hoping to catch a glimpse of the person while saying to his disciples, “Who touched my clothes?”

The disciples were completely bewildered by question since there were so many people around him. The woman, however, knew why Jesus asked this and humbly fell before him to tell him her story.

“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.”

As Jesus continued his journey, some of Jairus’ servants approached the entourage to inform him his daughter died, which meant there was no need for Jesus to come to his house. Jesus ignored their suggestion and told Jairus not to fear.

When they arrived at the house, Jesus told the neighbors who had gathered to go outside. He entered the daughter’s room, along with her parents and Peter, James and John. He took the lifeless child by the hand and told her to get up, which she did.

“Give her something to eat,” Jesus said, “and tell no one what happened here.”

These are two fascinating stories that Mark braids together, which was not unusual for him. Four times, Mark starts to tell a story, and in the middle he starts another. How do these two stories speak to us this morning?

**They invite us to reach out to Jesus when we are struggling.** By no means is this the only time we are to do this, but under no circumstance should we face a challenge without his help. For you see, Jesus will help anyone who asks.

Why do you think Mark laced these two stories together? Was it to demonstrate Jesus’ concern for all people? I think so.

Could the main characters in these stories be more different? Jairus was one of the most prominent, powerful and influential men in his community. We don’t even know the name of the woman who touched the hem of his garment, and I doubt very many in that crowd did, either. She wielded no power or influence.

And yet, Jesus responded to both of them with the same degree of compassion. He interrupted his schedule for both of them, listened to their stories and met their needs. He will do the same for you and me, too.

How will Jesus respond when we reach out to him like Jairus and this unnamed woman did? Will he heal us or take away our struggle? He might, and then again, he might not.

What I know for sure, though, is the Lord will walk with us every step of the way and see us through whatever we are facing. He will be merciful, compassionate and loyal.

What are you struggling with this morning? What stiff challenge are you facing? Have you asked for God’s help or is this hard for you to do?

Let me remind you it was not easy for either of these people to approach Jesus that day. It was unthinkable that a prominent ruler in the synagogue would ask any favor from this itinerant preacher and this woman risked public humiliation to do what she did. Yet, both of them fell to their knees before Jesus, pleading for help.

Why? Both of them were desperate, the only thing they had in common. Her pain pushed aside her fear and, as my friend Tom Ehrich writes, “His broken heart broke his haughty spirit.”

I don’t know what you are struggling with today, but let me encourage you to reach out to Jesus for help. He will be there for you.

These stories invite us to do something else this morning. **They challenge us to look beyond our own needs as we go along our way and reach out in Jesus’ name to others who are struggling.** This includes family members whom we love dearly, neighbors whom we have grown to appreciate and strangers who appear in our pathway.

Each time I read this story, I am impressed with Jairus’ love for his daughter. He risked everything to help her, and he had a lot to lose. A man of his standing in the community would never drop to his knees in public and beg for anything, but he did. Why? He wanted his daughter to live more than he wanted his reputation and standing in the community to remain intact. He was willing to give up everything for her, which he probably did.

What do your children need from you at this time in their lives? What sacrifices are you being called on to make on their behalf? If you don’t respond with compassion, who will? If you don’t throw caution to the wind, what will happen?

Hall of Fame pitcher, Jim Palmer, was one of the Baltimore Orioles’ finest pitchers. He still holds the record for the most games won, 268. He was an American League All Star six times, winning three Cy Young Awards and four Gold Gloves during his nineteen year career with the Orioles.

Recently, Palmer put his trophies up for sale, not because he needs the money, but his grandchildren do. The sale of his trophies will be used to help fund his grandchildren’s college education and take care of his fifteen year old stepson, Spencer, who is autistic.

When asked how he could do this, the sixty-six year old Palmer replied, “My priorities have changed over the years. At this juncture in my life, I would rather concern myself with the education of my grandchildren and the well-being of my stepson.”

At times, all of us need to rearrange our priorities for the sake of our children. Love requires us to make sacrifices on their behalf, perhaps doing things we never thought we would. Is this one of those times for you? What changes do you need to make to help those closest to you who are struggling? I am confident Jesus will help you do this if you ask.

Beyond this, though, I think these stories encourage us to see every person we meet along our way as a member of our own family. We are to respond to neighbors and strangers with the same level of compassion we would our own children.

Did you notice how Jesus referred to the woman who touched the hem of his garment? He called her, “Daughter.” Why? As far as we know, he had no children.

Unlike the little girl in the first story, she had no one to plead her case and get her help. She was on her own, that is until she met Jesus. "Daughter," Jesus called her, as if she was a member of his own family who was loved as dearly as that twelve year old girl.

**Who needs you to treat them as if they were your child?** What difference would it make? How would it help them overcome their struggles? What would it do for you?

**Who reached out to you as if you were a member of their family when you needed an advocate?** What difference did it make in your life? Maybe it is time to pass it forward. I suspect you will have an opportunity this week. I hope you will follow Jesus' example.