

Mark is making something of a sandwich for himself this morning with the way he tells this story about Jesus. I don’t mean a literal sandwich, but he is putting some things together—smooshing one thing between two other things really. Whether these things go together or not depends entirely upon your tastes. I had a friend in high school who brought a peanut butter and mayonnaise sandwich for lunch every day. Not Peanut Butter and Jelly; Peanut Butter and Mayonnaise. In my opinion, my friend was ruining two perfectly good slices of bread. But to her, mayonnaise and peanut butter went together just right. In the case of Mark, he starts out with a slice about a man named Jairus. A synagogue leader, he has a daughter who is on the brink of death. We’re told that she is 12. In Jewish culture this means she is almost an adult, almost able to marry, almost of age where she will have to go to bat for herself. Soon she will be old enough to have a child of her own, but for now she is still someone else’s child.

What we are not told is what her sickness is, how long she’s had it, or what, if anything, her father has tried up to this point to make her better. Jairus is a synagogue leader. One didn’t become a synagogue leader overnight. Jobs like that usually went only to the men who were good upstanding citizens in the community, whose reputation preceded them. It’s likely that Jairus had a good paying job then, access to the best medical care around, and enough pull to get his daughter whatever she needed. Has Jairus tried all this? Mark doesn’t say. All Mark says is, the girl is sick, nearly dead, and her father goes to get Jesus.

I wonder if it felt like a bold move for Jairus. Jesus and synagogue leaders didn’t tend to get along very well. The synagogue leaders found Jesus to be religious—he went to temple, taught that one ought to tithe, clearly read and loved the scriptures—and they liked all this about him. But for being religious he was also too much like everyone who wasn’t religious, and they didn’t like this about him. That he refused to condemn the sinful but instead forgave them. That he was a friend to drunkards and hookers and was skeptical of people who weren’t. The synagogue leaders didn’t like Jesus, and Jesus didn’t always like the synagogue leaders because for being religious, they weren’t very humble.

Now maybe Jairus was the exception, or maybe Jesus was making an exception, or maybe—and I think this is it—maybe both Jesus and Jairus knew that next to little girls dying, there are no exceptions. So, when Jairus asks Jesus if he will come and lay his hands on his daughter, Jesus just goes.

And of course, a crowd goes with him, probably because they want to see if he can pull it off, but in this crowd, we are told, is also a woman who has been bleeding from the inside-out for 12 years, and she has told herself that if she can just grab hold of Jesus's clothing, maybe something will happen.

What happens is that her bleeding stops immediately. She feels it in her body, like someone turned a wrench and shut off the faucet, and Jesus feels it too, like someone turned a wrench and turned on the faucet full blast.

“Who touched me?” he asks the crowds.

“What do you mean, who touched you?” his disciples say. “You see the crowd pressing in on every side. Who isn't touching you?”

“No, no, no,” Jesus tells them. “This isn't like that. Someone just took some of my power from me.”

Whenever we hear the word power in the Bible, it's the Greek word *dunamis*, meaning dynamic, dynamite. In other words, when Jesus says, “Who touched me?” he's saying, “Who lit my fuse? Who has turned me on and is burning me up?”

I wonder what it feels like to you to lose power. I know what it feels like to me. To me, losing power often means losing control, which means being defenseless, vulnerable, even violated and ripped off. Of course, the opposite can also be true. For the one who receives power there is renewal of purpose and person.

I wonder what it felt like to Jairus. Don't forget, he's got Jesus in his grasp. They're on their way to his house, to see his dying daughter, to have Jesus lay his hands on her, to light her up with some of that healing power, to snatch her back from death. But not before Jesus has to stop and meet whoever it is that has laid their hands on *him*.

“Come on Jesus. So much has run out on me already. All that's left is time, and time is power. Do you have to stop now?”

It's a stunning, startling turn in the story that this woman, bleeding—I mean, everywhere she goes she leaves a trail of blood—this woman who probably hasn't sat at

the dinner table with her family for 12 years—as many years as Jairus’s daughter has been alive—for 12 years no one has wanted to sit at the dinner table with her...and her blood—she’s been isolated, turned-away, as good as dead—Mark doesn’t even give her a name, only a label: she’s the hemorrhaging woman—and one day this woman walks out her front door and pushes her way through a crowd to get herself to Jesus. She doesn’t go to him because she thinks he can, or will, heal her. No, Mark tells us that she was as surprised as anyone to discover herself healed. She went to Jesus hoping only that he might not turn her away like everyone else had, that he might embrace her, blood and all. She tells herself, this would be well enough for me. Because for this woman time was not running out. Time had simply gone on too long.

We already know how the story ends. It’s as predictable as it is stunning and startling. In the time it takes Jesus to figure out that it was the woman who had touched his clothes and stolen his power, a couple people arrive to tell Jairus that his daughter is dead and there’s no point in troubling Jesus anymore. How terrible Jairus must have felt. If only he hadn’t waited so long to get to Jesus. If only Jesus hadn’t waited so long to get to his daughter. The things we tell ourselves we should have done or that God should have done when it feels too late. Jesus tells Jairus not to worry, that it’s not too late, his daughter is only sleeping and Jairus need only to believe.

So, arriving at his house, Jesus takes Jairus and his wife, and just a few of the disciples, and he goes in to the room where the little girl is, and Jesus tells her to get up, and to the amazement of the small group, she does. And this is where Mark makes sure to record two instructions that Jesus gives: one, that no one should tell anyone a thing about this, and two, that the little girl should be given something to eat.

Was the girl just asleep like Jesus said she was? Or did Jesus do something more, like resurrect the girl from the dead, and he doesn’t tell us, and he doesn’t want us to tell anyone else either, because he knows we probably can’t tell the difference between life and death anyway? When I was working for hospice, it always got me how, whenever I was at a person’s bedside and they would pass—and it was pretty obvious that the person had passed—the family would then have to place a call to a nurse to come out to the house to care for the body. Sometimes it would take the nurse a bit to get there, 20, even 60 minutes, and when the nurse got there, inevitably at least one person in the room would

say, “We think they’re gone, but you better check.” What do you mean, we think they’re gone? Don’t you know? Don’t we know what life and death looks like? Is this why Jesus tells the little girl’s parents to give her something to eat? If she eats something, then we know she’s still alive?

You see, I’ve come to believe that it’s not hard to believe in life after death. What’s hard is telling the difference between the two. Because some people can go through life like that woman, just bleeding out slowly, and no one wants to see them. They have to shut themselves away for 12 years, until one day someone says, “Hey, there’s that woman. I thought she was dead. She sure looks dead. I didn’t know she was alive still.”

But Jesus, looking down at his own pierced hands—a little dried blood marks the spot where death did him in—looks up at that woman pushing her way through the crowd, and he says, “She’s not dead. Not by a long shot. She’s just getting going again.” Amen.