

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | JUNE 27, 2021

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-33 | PSALM 30 | 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15 | MARK 5:21-43

In the sixteenth century, Europeans began assembling boxes called *Wunderkammer*.<sup>1</sup> This German for “cabinet of wonders.” Each cabinet resembled a bookcase full of unusual objects. A feather. A gem. A mirror. A drawing. A coin. A dried flower.

You might imagine that looking at a *Wunderkammer* would be as exciting as rummaging through someone else’s junk drawer. But there was a particular way you were supposed to use them. You would look at or hold two objects—let’s say a deer antler and a fossil—and you would think about the juxtaposition between the two objects. How does one object change how to see the other?

St. Mark uses a similar technique in his gospel. Sometimes he’ll tell us a story and then put another story in the middle of it. Sometimes we assume that it’s just sloppy editing, but it’s very intentional. He wants us to think about these stories interpret, challenge, and shed new light on each other. So the whole gospel itself is a kind of cabinet of wonders.

You heard an example of that today. Today’s gospel story was actually two stories. The first story you heard today was about a man named Jairus who has a sick daughter at home. And that story was broken up with a second story about a woman who has been bleeding for years. So we’re going to treat these stories like our own *Wunderkammer*. We’re going to hold them next to each other and see how they do more together than they could do on their own.

Let’s start with one moment in the second story. Jesus is walking through a crowd of people when a woman touches his cloak, thinking that just touching Jesus will be enough to heal her. When she touches his cloak, Jesus feels something change in him. And so he tries to figure out who it was. But there’s an obvious question here, too. Why does Jesus want to know who it was?

Our expectation is that Jesus wants to know because he’s upset. Jesus only has a limited amount of time and energy, and people can’t just go using it up whenever they want and God knows Jairus’s daughter is going to take up half an afternoon and don’t you have any idea how *busy* Jesus is?

That seems to be what the woman thinks. When she approaches Jesus, Mark tells us that she approaches with “fear and trembling.” She’s ready to get chastised in front of all her neighbors. That seems to be what the disciples think something similar. When Jesus asks who touched him, they think he’s being ridiculous. They look around and think, “You’ll never figure out who it was. Don’t waste you energy trying to track someone down. Lets get a move on.”

But that’s not what Jesus does. Jesus confirms her healing. He doesn’t heal her then, but he acknowledges what’s already happened. Essentially, “Yes. You’re right. You’re healed of your disease.”

This is surely a relief to this woman, but it doesn’t really answer our question. Why did Jesus stop everything so he could tell this woman what she already knew?

Because in Mark’s gospel, Jesus’s miracles are always about creating relationships.<sup>2</sup> They are always about bringing people to trust and inviting them to find their life in him. So what

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Macdonald, *Vesper Flights* (Grove Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Rowan Williams, *Meeting God in Mark: Reflections for the Season of Lent* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 36.

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Jesus is worried about here isn't that this woman is taking up limited resources. He's not mad that she touched him. He's worried that there will be a miracle that takes place outside of a relationship.

A miracle that takes place without a relationship is just a magic trick. And what do you say after you see a magic trick? *How'd they do that?* But that's not the question Jesus wants people to be asking. The question Jesus wants them to be asking is *Who is this?* That's why Jesus seeks out the woman. And you notice when Jesus confirms her healing he doesn't say, "You're better because you touched my magic robe." He says, "Your faith has made you well." "Faith" here is better translated as "trust." Jesus doesn't want people to be impressed or amazed or surprised or excited. Jesus wants people to trust. To say, *Who is Jesus? Someone who is interested in my flourishing. Someone I can rely on. This is someone that I can depend on.*

Let's reach back into the cabinet and pull out the story about Jairus's daughter. If you read that story by itself in isolation from everything else, the climax of the story looks like the moment when the girl walks again and people are overcome with amazement. In the King James Version, they are "astonished with great astonishment."

But remember what we learned from the first story. Jesus isn't interested in people being amazed. And Jesus isn't interested in people being astonished with great astonishment. Jesus is interested in people's trust. Notice how Jesus responds to their astonishment. He "strictly ordered them that no one should know [about] this." Because just as he didn't want the woman in the crowd to be healed without a relationship, Jesus doesn't want people to be impressed without an encounter.

That first story actually changes where we find the climax of the second story. The really transformative moment in that story comes in a little aside Jesus makes to Jairus. While people are wailing and clamoring and pushing around, Jesus leans over to Jairus and says, "Do not fear, only believe." "Believe" comes from the Greek word for—you guessed it—trust. Essentially, Jesus same thing he says to the unnamed woman. *Do not fear. Only trust.*

Whenever we gather together here at table, Christ says the same to us. Like the woman healed, we are too precious and valuable to be written off or left to our own devices. Jesus stops everything just to say, "Do not fear. Only trust." And like Jairus surrounded by the wailing, Jesus cuts through the fever of life with words of grace and truth. "Your faith has made you well."

The gift we celebrate here at table is not a magic trick. It is not meant to impress us or amaze us or astonish us. It is not simply that bread becomes body or wine becomes blood. No, the gift we celebrate here is that, like Jairus and the unnamed woman, Christ seeks us out again and again and again. In the middle of the crowd. Cutting through all the noise. The body of wonders that brings us to faith. *Christ is given for you.*

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