

Boundary Breaker

- Traveled to Israel many years ago with pastors from our region of Montana.
 - A few months before we arrived, the Health Ministry awarded a prize to a pediatrics professor for her book on hereditary diseases common to Jews.
 - Channa Maayan knew that the head of Israel's Ministry of Health was an ultra-orthodox Jew.
 - To be sensitive, she wore a long-sleeve top and long skirt.
 - But she wasn't prepared for her experience of this government-sponsored awards ceremony.
 - Not only did she and her husband have to sit separately since men and women were segregated at the event.
 - But she was also informed that a male colleague would have to accept the award for her because women were not permitted on the stage.

- Ultra-Orthodox Jews¹ make up 13% of 9.7 million population)
 - The Ultra-Orthodox are known as Haredim, meaning 'those who tremble before God'
 - Haredim are made up of various groups with different approaches to liturgy - different lengths of black coats, hat style, beard, side locks, and women's head coverings
 - They're at best ambivalent about modern state of Israel because it's not religious enough
 - They believe in a life centered on Torah (which is the first five books of the Hebrew Bible and our own: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy)
 - They pursue a life of rigorous faithfulness, not unlike the Pharisees we read of in the New Testament, trusting that when Jews become obedient, the Messiah will come
 - Haredim have protested for decades state practices like conscription to the military, like running city buses on the Sabbath, and like men and women sharing public transportation

- There is enormous conflict between Haredim and secular Jews over the role of women
 - Just this week, saw a photograph of a sign over a narrow Ultra-Orthodox alleyway that reads:
 - To WOMEN AND GIRLS who pass through our neighborhood we beg you with all our hearts **PLEASE DO NOT PASS THROUGH OUR NEIGHBORHOOD IN IMMODEST CLOTHES**
 - Modest means: Closed blouse, With long sleeves, Long skirt, No trousers, No tight-fitting clothes

¹ Bronner & Kirshner, 'Israel faces a seismic rift over the role of women,' *International Herald Tribune*, Monday, January 16, 2012.

- Please do not disturb the sanctity of our neighborhood and our way of life as Jews committed to G-D and his Torah.
 - The irony? I left this photo on a news site to copy some of the words of this sign into my Word document; when I returned, a pop-up box for women's underwear
- From the Haredim perspective, from their reading of the Scriptures we share – and because those Scriptures *do* say this - to touch a woman who is menstruating is to become ritually/ceremonially unclean before God. So if men and women must share bus space, not only may men be *tempted* by women, but it would be impossible for a man preserve himself from the defilement that comes from brushing up against a woman in her uncleanness

The story we're reading from Mark's gospel this morning, and the powerful cultural pressures at work within it, comes more fully alive against the backdrop of this worldview and tension./

For context, recall how Jesus **crossed over** to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. Recall how he is found to be asleep in the storm and calms the winds and waves on his way to seek out an impure man in an impure land among impure graves who was possessed by a demon. He crossed the sea to still the storm of this outsider to Jewish faith who had been abandoned to cry out and cut himself from inner torment.

Now Jesus **crosses the waters west**. This from the *Message* version of Mark 5.21 (and following)...

²¹⁻²⁴ After Jesus crossed over by boat, a large crowd met him at the seaside. One of the meeting-place leaders named Jairus came. When he saw Jesus, he fell to his knees, beside himself as he begged, "My dear daughter is at death's door. Come and lay hands on her so she will get well and live." (unquote)

On the other side of the Sea of Galilee Jesus pursued an outsider. Here he encounters an insider. Jairus is a low-level local synagogue leader. He has likely been quite careful *not* to become too closely associated with Jesus. To be too much connected to a revolutionary in public – to be identified with the rules he is breaking and the people he is embracing – would be to associate himself with mocking tradition. And that would get people talking. And not just locally. It would be bad for business. Best to at least feign neutrality.

But what happens when it's his own daughter in jeopardy? Jairus disregards pride and politics. He throws himself at the feet of the One whose refreshing faith and healing authority have given him private hope.

And what does Jesus do? Scold him for showing up only when he becomes personally desperate? No. Jesus simply goes with him. 'Outsider' and 'insider' are such ridiculous distinctions. Jesus moves toward both.

So he goes with this distraught father of girl we will later discover is twelve years old. And the whole crowd tags along, pushing and jostling. Some in admiration. Some to see the spectacle. Some hoping to watch this radical make a misstep that will destroy him.

But then, on the way, an interruption to this scene with all its layers. I'm picking up in Mark 5:25:

²⁵⁻²⁹ A woman who had suffered a condition of hemorrhaging for twelve years—a long succession of physicians had treated her, and treated her badly, taking all her money and leaving her worse off than before—had heard about Jesus. She slipped in from behind and touched his robe. She was thinking to herself, “If I can put a finger on his robe, I can get well.” The moment she did it, the flow of blood dried up. She could feel the change and knew her plague was over and done with.

³⁰ At the same moment, Jesus felt energy discharging from him. He turned around to the crowd and asked, “Who touched my robe?”

³¹ His disciples said, “What are you talking about? With this crowd pushing and jostling you, you're asking, ‘Who touched me?’ Dozens have touched you!”

³²⁻³³ But [Jesus] went on asking, looking around to see who had done it. The woman, knowing what had happened, knowing she was the one, stepped up in fear and trembling, knelt before him, and gave him the whole story (told him the whole truth).

³⁴ Jesus said to her, “Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague.”

- So on his way with Jairus, the insider, to see about his suffering daughter, Jesus is interrupted almost imperceptibly
- Mark tells us about a woman who has suffered bleeding for 12 years. She's endured agony. Seen many physicians. Spent all she had. And gotten no better. Only worse. She's declined for 12 years, and is declining. Losing hope. Mark calls her condition a scourge and a torment. Not only an experience of physical suffering, but isolating and dispiriting shame.
- According to Torah (The purity laws beginning in Leviticus 11 - their Scriptures and ours - a woman is unclean 7 days after her monthly period, but if she suffers a malady such as this one, she remains unclean. She and anyone who touches her is to be separated from the community until purified by ritual bathing (Lev 15:19-27; Jim Edwards, *Gospel of Mark*, 163). But there is no bath that can overcome internal bleeding and its stigma; hers is a socially unacceptable suffering and grief
- When this woman joins the crowd encircling Jesus, we don't know what she has heard about him. What we know is that she's come to the end of her own resources and has become willing to risk reaching out.

- She barely touches his clothing. It's the light touch of brushing up against someone in a city bus
 - Still she feels in her body that she's been made well.
 - And Jesus wants to know who touched him. He's felt the healing go out from him. And he begins to search, knowingly.
 - Which of course terrifies the woman. Why?
 - She's crossed over the line
 - She's not even supposed to *be* in public.
 - She's not supposed to touch *anyone*, especially a teacher of the law
 - But having sensed the wellness for which she had dared hope, she falls down before Jesus, and begins telling him 'the whole truth' of her story.
 - Do you feel the tension? Can you see the various faces in the crowd? Can you experience their confusion and disgust and wonder and relieved hope? The men? The women?
 - And what about Jairus? Standing there desperate. Waiting. Every second a weakening heartbeat of his child.

- And what does Jesus do? Reproach this woman? Recoil in fear of contamination? Does he step back in revulsion to shun her?/
 - No. In the urgency of the moment he pauses to listen un-anxiously to her whole story.
 - He affirms her and offers blessing: 'Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.'
 - And in his affirmation? Jesus risks the crucifying anger of his culture. He publicly crosses the boundaries of society and Scripture and status quo to embrace this one he calls 'daughter.'

Let's step back for a minute ourselves. There are any number of meaningful places to engage with this story, aren't there?

- Perhaps the first has to do with where healing is to be found. The affirmation of Mark's gospel is that when we risk coming to Jesus in faith, he *longs* to give us God's wellness. What we learn, in fact, says Jim Edwards, is that 'our very *desire* for healing and wholeness is *in fact* the desire for *Jesus*.'
 - And so we might pause to consider: What is it that's bleeding your life away? And when was the last time you risked reaching out, falling before him to tell him the whole truth of your need?

- Or consider God's timing. Is there a situation that is so urgent, so obviously one in which the Lord himself would wish, should wish, to give aid, and yet... you wait. You wait. Like Jairus, you wait on the Lord who is with you but not moving fast enough. You wait watching others be healed, others, even outsiders like the Gerasene or this woman in her religious uncleanness, when you might claim insider status. What does this passage say to us about even our most desperate prayers? About God's timing?

- And then there's that word Daughter. '*Daughter*, your trust in me has made you well.' Think of the irony of Jesus' going with this father to bear help to his 12 year old daughter who is dying (a socially acceptable suffering). And Jesus stopping along the way to heal and hear a woman 12 years suffering from bleeding and stigma (an unacceptable suffering – partially brought about by the teaching of this father's synagogue).
- But listen to the affection in Jesus' calling her 'Daughter'
- Are the two not both daughters of the Lord? Children of God? Are they not both worthy of the Lord's compassion? And the compassion of their community?
 - There seems to be something really weighty here to this effect: that what we are desperate for for those we consider our own children is what we're meant to be desperate for for all God's children.
 - The truth is that it's much easier to cry out for the goodness of God's healing to rescue those we love and those we understand than those whose suffering we've not encountered personally and have come to judge unacceptable
 - So it may be easy to stand with the woman left off the stage by the Ultra-Orthodox at her own awards ceremony
 - But this passage begs the question: Who is taboo for you? For me? Whose suffering is easy for you to trivialize?
 - Is it immigrants seeking asylum? Is it gay kids? Is it the people of Gaza or Israel? Is it Republicans? Or Democrats?
- I wonder about Jairus' experience of Jesus's healing for *him*.
 - What if truly what we are desperate for the Lord to do for the ones we count our own kids is what we're meant to be desperate for the Lord to do for *all* those God calls God's children?/

You may know that in Mark, there's a literary technique called a Markan Sandwich. In a Markan sandwich one story surrounds another. So one story is like the bacon, lettuce and tomato and the other is like the homemade bread surrounding the bacon, lettuce and tomato. What happens is that the 'bread' story serves to comment on the 'bacon, lettuce and tomato' story.

And what happens? What's the rest of the story? Jesus goes with Jairus not merely to heal his daughter. No. By the time he has listened to the woman set free of her hemorrhage, Jairus' daughter has died. So Jesus goes not merely to heal her, but to take her by the hand and raise her from the dead.

Do you see how the story of the 12 year old daughter encompasses the story of the daughter who has suffered for 12 years? And how Jesus' touch of both insider and outsider is a matter of not only physical healing, but of life and death.

The encounter may just touch Jairus with the miracle of resurrection, too.

What might Jesus be saying to you?