

# WHEN OUT OF OUR DEPTH

## Sermon, July 1, 2018

### Texts: Psalm 130, Matthew 5:21-36

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy."

Psalm 130:1-2

When his life is in the depths, when he's feeling isolated and overwhelmed, when events in his life seem out of control, the Psalmist takes his despair to the One he believes can do something about it. He continues in verse 5 -- "*Wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope.*" And in our reading from Mark 5, we find two such people who were in the depths and find hope in the Lord; originally, I had somewhat ambitiously planned to talk about both people this morning, but in the process of preparation I wound up narrowing it down to just one ... that's the good news I have for you this morning; otherwise, we might have been here through lunch.

As you may know, Mark's gospel is a rather concise, action-packed account of Jesus' life and ministry. In the first two chapters there are no lengthy genealogies, no Mary and Joseph or little towns of Bethlehem, no wise men bringing gifts and no guiding stars, no Simeons or Annas at the temple. In the first two chapters Mark just plunges right into the action of Jesus' adult ministry with His baptism, His temptation, His calling of the disciples, His taking on demonic spirits, and accounts of His healings. Then in chapter three, after His healing of the man with the withered hand (*a passage we looked at June 3*) we read in verse seven, "... a large crowd from Galilee followed Him, [for] they heard all that He was doing, they came to Him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and around Tyre and Sidon." The crowd had grown so large that Jesus told His disciples to prepare a boat and have it on hand just in case, so the crowd would not crush Him as they pressed in ... now, that's a lot of people! In that same boat, chapter four, Jesus calmed a storm at sea, and we are told the disciples were amazed ... and even a bit terrified! In chapter five, in that same boat Jesus and His disciples crossed over the Sea of Galilee to a non-Jewish area where Jesus healed a man driven out of his mind by a legion of demonic spirits. Jesus cast the demons into a herd of two thousand pigs, and that whole herd of deviled ham threw themselves over a cliff into the water below; we are told by Mark *everyone* was amazed. When Jesus and the disciples return back to the other side of the sea (*actually, the "Sea" of Galilee is a large lake*) in today's reading, we find a huge crowd waiting for them. Mark's action-packed drama just keeps building and building, and the crowd gathering around Jesus just keeps growing and growing.

In Mark's building drama the next person who appears is Jairus. Jairus is the prominent leader of the local synagogue in Capernaum; you may remember Jesus spent a lot of time in Capernaum. This distinguished leader throws himself at Jesus' feet, in full view of this growing crowd, pleading with Jesus to come to his home and heal his twelve year old daughter. We are told in other sources that the synagogue has already taken a public position on Jesus, calling Him a false messiah. So, this really wasn't a good career move for this synagogue leader. After all, it was his job to keep the crowds away from false hopes, false teachings, and manipulative "saviors" who promise you miracles while simultaneously emptying your wallets. The last thing Jairus ought to be doing is giving this "false messiah" public credibility by pleading at His feet in full view of this very large crowd. But when your child is dying ... when anyone you love is enduring great suffering ... you're not thinking much about good career moves or your public image. You're not thinking about much else at all; all you're thinking about is the suffering of the one you cherish. Everything else in your world just stops. Actually, it doesn't stop ... and that's one of the most maddening things experienced by those who grieve, as many of you know. For everyone else, the world just goes on as normal; but for you, your world has stopped ... nothing else matters. Jairus will do anything to save his little girl. So, he pleads for Jesus to come to his house, Jesus accepts his invitation, and they head off to Jairus' home.

Now, this was a big deal! Jairus was an important person, and Jesus now has an opportunity to have influence with this man of power and prestige. The growing crowd was excited! Something of a parade developed around them as they walked, the drama continues to build, and suddenly, this is all interrupted and the parade comes to a halt. "*And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.*" So here we meet an anonymous woman, a face in the crowd, who, like Jairus, has been nursing a twelve year old problem of her own. Now, again, Jesus is on His way to an important appointment! This is His great opportunity! The crowds are with Him, they're following Him, and He's on His way to the home of the biggest cheese in town. Don't stop now, Jesus! Besides, the average triage nurse in any ER would say this anonymous woman is not a priority; she's been ill for a long time, but this little girl is dying and should get the physician's primary attention! But the divine Physician has priorities of His own, and He stops the parade for this one ordinary, anonymous woman in the crowd. Mark tells us that "... *she had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of growing better she grew worse.*" Some of us have been there ... many of us know from personal experience that even today the medical profession is often more of an art than a science, and doctors can misdiagnose and/or conflict with each other and, at times, make matters worse rather than better. To be sure, medicine is an honorable profession, and we owe much to the dedicated professionals and the advances in medicine we all enjoy ... but even the best professionals and the

results of the most extensive research have their limits. By the way, if you ARE in the medical profession, you may prefer to read this story in Luke's Gospel (*Luke 8*). Luke was a doctor himself, and he conveniently leaves out this part about "suffering under many physicians, and spending all she had, and getting worse." But not Mark. It's as if Mark wants to press this point: THIS WOMAN HAS DONE EVERYTHING SHE CAN DO. She really has tried to get well. And now she is all out of money, she is all out of expert advice, all out of hope. Yet, the bleeding continues. In fact, it's worse.

I think Mark, the author of this text, is putting something of a literary magnifying glass up to the crowd around Jesus and is focusing our vision on just one ordinary person in it ... one ordinary person who is bleeding, one ordinary person who has a hemorrhaging that just won't stop. Maybe Mark does this because she is typical ... typical of the many individuals who make up any crowd which has gathered around Jesus. I've been a pastor long enough to know that many of us in the crowd gathering around Jesus each week in worship are quietly bleeding ... some may be bleeding physically with a chronic medical problem; or some may be bleeding emotionally, spiritually, psychologically ... and at times it seems the "hemorrhaging" just won't stop. I think it's a safe bet to say that each and every one of us here this morning is dealing to some degree or another with something that just isn't right; in fact, if you knew what the people sitting next to you in these pews this morning are dealing with in their own lives, you might be truly overwhelmed. For that matter, there isn't a person in *any* crowd who isn't dealing or coping with something. That is our lot in a fallen world. There is something wrong with everything and everyone ... it may vary by degree or intensity or longevity, but no one is spared. By the way, there's *also* something right and good and praiseworthy with everything and everyone, and it is good to think about what is right and good and praiseworthy and to encourage and promote and affirm what is right and good and praiseworthy, but that's another sermon. I've quoted this before, but Ann Landers once wrote, "*Be kind to people. The world needs kindness so much. You never know what sort of battles other people are fighting. Often just a soft word or a warm compliment can be immensely supportive. You can do a great deal of good by just being considerate, by extending a little friendship, going out of your way to do just one nice thing, or saying one good word.*" We come across people every single day who are being beaten up by life and they, too, are quietly bleeding. Maybe that's Mark's subtle point in calling our attention to this one anonymous afflicted woman.

According to Mark, a whole lot of people in this growing crowd are pushing and pressing in to get close to Jesus. They're rubbing shoulders with Jesus, they're jostling to be seen near Him, they're pressing in around Him. But what's notable about this woman is that she did not push or grab at Jesus, or try to rub shoulders with the Jesus crowd. In humility, she came up quietly behind Him, knelt down on the ground in reverence and respect, and quietly reached out her hand to touch the hem of His robe. We are told that immediately her bleeding stopped. And just as immediately, Jesus stops the parade. He looks at the disciples and asks, "*Who touched me?*" The disciples think He has to be kidding. "*Who touched you? Jesus, half of Galilee is out here trying to get their hands on you. Come on, keep moving to Jairus' home. Don't get sidetracked! Let's go!*"

But Jesus knows how to pay attention to the moment at hand. He wants to respond to someone who has reached out and touched Him in faith, not grabbing at Him or grabbing something from Him or pressing in on Him just to be around Him, but humbly reaching out and touching Him as if she were laying hands on something holy. When He finds her, He does something He never does anywhere else in the Bible ... He calls her "Daughter." "*Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.*" In calling this anonymous, hurt, spent woman "Daughter," Jesus publicly gives her the same relationship to Him that Jairus has with his daughter. The twelve year old little girl was important in the eyes of the crowd because she belonged to the important local leader. This woman who had suffered the entire twelve years this little girl was alive, she was made a somebody in the eyes of the crowd because she was now recognized as a daughter of an important leader, as well ... a daughter of the Lord of lords and King of kings.

This interruption and delay does have its price. Word comes that the daughter of Jairus has died; we'll look at that next week. But for now, I want to note that I believe this text teaches this basic principle that we who reach out in sincere and humble faith are put into a relationship with Jesus. As we reach out to Him in reverence and humility, may we hear His words: "*Daughter. Son. Your faith has healed you, Go in peace, and be free.*" There is no depth too deep for Him to hear your call, and He always has time to stop for you.



*This unique picture is an artist's rendering by Daniel Cariola (entitled "Encounter") of the touch of this anonymous woman. The original is on display as a large mural in the new worship center in Magdala; we visited Magdala on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee during our Holy Land tour last February. More information (including how to order certified prints) may be found at [www.magdala.org](http://www.magdala.org)*