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Mark 5:21-43  
February 8, 2026

## Too Late

Well I have just returned from New York City where it was a balmy 8 degrees outside, negative 5 degrees windchill. I went out to help Sofia move into her new apartment while at school. Let me tell you, it is no fun moving in those temperatures. I like our weather in Washington. 45 degrees and rainy is delightful.

Having traveled to New York City many times before, I thought I had this trip down pat.

I arrived at the PDX airport an hour and a half before boarding my flight. Checked my bags. Since I had TSA pre check, I expected getting through security would have been a piece of cake. This time, not so much.

The TSA pre check line was unusually long. After waiting, I got to the TSA agent who said that my TSA number was not in their system. I had to go back to the ticket counter and get it fixed or wait in the very long general security line.

Back to the ticket counter. Another long wait.

The agent fixed my problem and added me to the TSA database. I was good to go.

Back to the very long TSA pre check line.

Made it through, but then I was tagged for a body scan security check.

Made it through the scan, but then my backpack was tagged for physical search.

At the search line, there was a young family ahead of me who was having all their bags searched through for baby formula and medicines. Finally, I got to the front of the bag search line. The agent looked for the X-ray of my backpack. Not there.

Back through the X-ray machine.

Finally, I made it through security in time to start boarding my flight.

And I thought, this wasn't the week to preach on how Jesus handled interruptions!

When I have a certain task to do, I can switch into hyper-focus mode. I think this is my actual super power. Nothing else really matters until I finish the task. And things like security delays or any other interruptions cause havoc with my plans. Can I get an Amen?

Jesus was a master handler of interruptions. As he was doing ministry and word spread about the miracles he performed, people from all over vied for his

attention. Crowds followed him everywhere. And yet, as busy as he was, he never seemed hurried. He remained at his consistent pace of 3 miles per hour.

To set the stage for our scripture story, Jesus had just come from teaching a crowd, calming a storm, and healing a demon possessed man. It was then that he crossed over to the other side of the lake with his disciples, but the crowd followed him there. Among the crowd was a man who urgently needed Jesus' help.

As I read, pay attention to how Mark tells this story. I call it a Markan sandwich, in other words, its a story within a story. Notice how Mark starts off telling one story of Jesus going to help this man, but then was interrupted by another person's need, and then returned to help the first person. We see this often in Mark's gospel which was aimed to drive home the theological point about Jesus' life and ministry.

Please join me as we read from Mark 5:21-43. I want you to pay attention to several things. What do you feel in your body? What emotions were raised? What are some of your first thoughts?

**21** Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee in a boat. It landed at the other side. There a large crowd gathered around him. **22** Then a man named Jairus came. He was a synagogue leader. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. **23** He begged Jesus, "Please come. My little daughter is dying. Place your hands on her to heal her. Then she will live." **24** So Jesus went with him. [That's the first part of the story. The bread of the Markan sandwich.]

A large group of people followed. They crowded around him. **25** A woman was there who had a sickness that made her bleed. It had lasted for 12 years. **26** She had suffered a great deal, even though she had gone to many doctors. She had spent all the money she had. But she was getting worse, not better. **27** Then she heard about Jesus. She came up behind him in the crowd and touched his clothes. **28** She thought, "I just need to touch his clothes. Then I will be healed." **29** Right away her bleeding stopped. She felt in her body that her suffering was over.

**30** At once Jesus knew that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd. He asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

**31** "You see the people," his disciples answered. "They are crowding against you. And you still ask, 'Who touched me?'"

**32** But Jesus kept looking around. He wanted to see who had touched him. **33** Then the woman came and fell at his feet. She knew what had happened to her. She was shaking with fear. But she told him the whole truth. **34** He said to her, "Dear woman, your faith has healed you. Go in peace. You are free from your suffering." [That's the meat of the story sandwich.]

**35** While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus. He was the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

**36** Jesus heard what they were saying. He told the synagogue leader, “Don’t be afraid. Just believe.”

**37** He let only Peter, James, and John, the brother of James, follow him.

**38** They came to the home of the synagogue leader. There Jesus saw a lot of confusion. People were crying and sobbing loudly. **39** He went inside. Then he said to them, “Why all this confusion and sobbing? The child is not dead. She is only sleeping.” **40** But they laughed at him.

He made them all go outside. He took only the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him. And he went in where the child was. **41** He took her by the hand. Then he said to her, “*Talitha koum!*” This means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” **42** The girl was 12 years old. Right away she stood up and began to walk around. They were totally amazed at this. **43** Jesus gave strict orders not to let anyone know what had happened. And he told them to give her something to eat. [That the second part of the first story or bread of the sandwich.]

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I’m curious...as you heard this story, what did you feel in your body? What emotions were raised? What were some of your first thoughts? (Get feed back from the congregation.) We all experience scripture differently. And God uses a multitude of ways through the Holy Spirit to speak to us. It is important for us to pay attention to our bodies, our hearts, and our minds as we listen.

I think there are many things we can learn from this account of Jesus’ life and ministry. We see how Jesus handled interruptions and how the order of God’s kingdom is upside down. We’ll explore the suffering that this woman endured and what it was that healed her. And finally we’ll ask how does this inform our lives and ministries today?

Pastor and author Alan Fadling in his book, *An Unhurried Life, Following Jesus’ Rhythms of Work and Rest*, describes a conversation that a friend had with pastor and author, Dallas Willard. He asked Dallas, “If you had one word to describe Jesus, what would it be? Teacher? Lord? Compassionate? Many words would fit.”

[What would you choose? (Ask the congregation.)]

Well Dallas offered his own word. It was relaxed.”<sup>1</sup>

Relaxed! Interesting. I don’t know if that description would have ever entered my mind. Relaxed!

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Fadling, *An Unhurried Life, Following Jesus’ Rhythms of Work and Rest* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 8-9.

BUT, that's a perfect description of how Jesus reacted in our scripture today. This was an urgent, crisis. The synagogue leader's young daughter was dying. They needed Jesus' help right away.

Now the scripture simply says that "Jesus went with him." It doesn't describe the speed at which they went. We just assume from the urgent nature that they hurried. Now if it had been me and my daughter was deathly ill, you bet I'd want to get there fast.

But there was a problem.

Remember the crowds that followed Jesus? They weren't going to let anyone through fast. People were all around and pressing in on him. It was then that this woman, a very sick woman, came along who also needed healing. Her situation was not as urgent, but she was equally desperate. She wasn't imminently dying. She had been dying slowly for twelve whole years.

She had made her way through the crowd to Jesus. She didn't want to bother him. She didn't demand any of his time. She simply longed to touch the hem of his robe, believing that if she could just do that that she would be healed.

Mark tells us that as she grabbed hold of Jesus' robe, power flowed through him and he turned around and asked. "Who touched me?"

Notice the disciples' response, "Uh Jesus, don't you see the people crowding around you and yet you ask, Who touched me?" That is a response of a hurried person.

But to Jesus, it was not a bother but a chance to meet this woman where she was at.

To receive her brokenness.

To let her be herself without having her life put together neatly.

To hear her whole story.

Jesus never hurried her. Never looked at his watch. He gave her the time she needed...even though he was on his way to another very grave situation.

How would we handle an interruption like this? Would we create space for others? Or would we look at our watches ready to get on with our to do lists?

Notice how this story points to the upside down nature of God's kingdom.

Later in Mark, Jesus described the coming of God's kingdom where, "The first will be last, and the last will be first."<sup>2</sup>

We see this clearly played out here. The synagogue ruler was a very important person of high standing in the community. He was a man. He held honor and prestige. He was used to people attending to his every need. And we even are told his name, Jairus.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 10:31; Matthew 20:16

But this woman, a second class citizen in Jewish culture back then, was not very important. She had no standing in society, no place of honor, no prestige. She was used to fending for herself. And she was ostracized from community, labeled unclean, impure, contagious. We don't even know her name.

Who did Jesus attend to first? This woman and her need. Jairus was left waiting on her for a change.

Folks this is how God's kingdom works. When Jesus said the first shall be last and the last shall be first, he meant it.

Who would we say are the least in our society today? Who doesn't have a voice or protected rights? Are we giving them the best of our time and attention? If not, could the Spirit of God be calling us to act?

Notice that when she reached through the crowd and grabbed hold of Jesus' robe that Jesus' healing flowed through him onto her. Her bleeding stopped and she immediately felt freed from all her suffering.

The Greek word that Mark used for suffering is *mastix*. It means scourged, whipped, or diseased...a condition that carried with it a torturous amount of pain. People like her were ostracized from their community because the Old Testament Law considered them "unclean." Think leper communities outside the city gates back then. That's where she had to live. Worse yet, it was also believed that her suffering was a punishment from God for some sin. So not only was her suffering physical, but it was emotional, spiritual, economic, and relational. For twelve whole years! That is a long time to suffer.

But what was it that actually healed her?

I think God began his healing, long before she encountered Jesus. Something within nudged her, prompted her, to seek Jesus out in the first place. This took great risk. Remember what I said about being ostracized. People like her were required to shout "Unclean" when they entered into community so that they wouldn't infect others. But this time, she risked keeping her condition hidden until she could get within touching proximity of Jesus. And she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."

So it was a great amount of faith that led her to this point. Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

But I think there was another thing that happened which would be easy to gloss over that also brought healing to her. Jesus created a safe space where she could come and tell him everything. With fear and trembling, this woman fell at Jesus' feet and told him the whole truth. Everything.

To Jesus she was seen, known, and heard. Not invisible, but mattered deeply to God.

My friends, this is a gift that we can offer others. To create space where people can be seen, known, and heard. Where their suffering can be expressed, offered up to God in prayer, and healing can be received.

Some years ago, Cascades had a very active and vibrant Stephen Ministries Program. We had up to ten Stephen Care givers who were specially trained to walk with people in suffering, grief, or life transition. We ministered to a lot of people within and beyond our congregation. Many of our care receivers are living healthy and whole lives now because of the care they received here.

I would love to see this ministry be revived. Not because I want it. But because this congregation feels called to it. To be trained for it. And offer themselves to it.

Notice how once this woman is healed, Jesus told her to go in peace and be freed of her suffering.

The Greek word for peace is *eirene*. It means to join or tie together into a whole. To have all of one's broken pieces and parts restored...put back together the way God intended before any trauma occurred. To have one's body and soul reintegrated with one another. To have complete rest.

This was the gift that Jesus gave her.

Don't we long for this same kind of peace ourselves? In our busy, hurried culture, many of us have left our souls behind and we long for spiritual rest. Rest that only Jesus can provide.

But now the other story continued. After this encounter with the bleeding women, Jesus continued on his way to Jairus' house when some men came to tell them "Too late. Your daughter has died. Don't bother the teacher any more."

Jesus told Jairus. "Don't be afraid; just believe."

In essence, Jesus told the synagogue leader to have faith like the woman who he just saw be healed. No-one told her to have faith. She just mustered whatever strength she could get out of desperation. That was faith.

Jairus expected power and prestige to persuade Jesus to do his bidding. Not faith.

Mark describes a very interesting detail that would be easy to overlook. The woman had been sick and bleeding for twelve years. Did you notice how old Jairus' daughter was? Twelve years old. Though we don't know how long she had been deathly ill, we see that in both cases, their healing was immediate. People were astonished.

So how does this inform our lives and ministries today?

I think this story is about interruptions. Do we see them as inconveniences to our busy schedules and to do lists? Or do we welcome them as opportunities to enter into whatever God is doing among us?

Author Henri Nouwen said near the end of his life, “My whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that interruptions were my work.” Fadling added, “We rush to do things for God at such a pace as to miss the appointments his Spirit puts right in front of our noses. I’m guessing that every day we miss opportunities to live a Christlike life, to offer simple expressions of care, affirmation, encouragement and recognition to people who cross our paths. We are moving too fast to stop and act and love.”<sup>3</sup>

Friends, if this is us, then perhaps what we need to do is slow down. Simplify our schedules. And leave enough margin so that we can receive life’s interruptions with same beauty and grace that Jesus did.

So may we be full of the Holy Spirit, aware of how the Father is at work in our world. May we slow down to the pace of Jesus, so that we don’t miss the holy interruptions when they come. And may we say yes when the opportunity presents itself to provide space for God’s healing and restoration in the lives of others.

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 85.