



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Well Made” **Sermon on Mark 5:21-43**

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Last Sunday, we heard the story of Jesus asleep in the boat during the storm. The disciples accused Jesus of the deadliest of the seven deadly sins, acedia. “Don’t you care?”

On that sinking boat, the disciples yelled at the sleeping one. “Don’t you care that we’re all going to die?” Jesus awoke, stood up and said to the storm, “Peace be still.” And then he said to his disciples, “Have you no faith?” The disciples said to one another, “Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Who is Jesus? That’s the question at the heart of Mark’s Gospel. Those closest to him don’t know. But, today, we find two people in a storm of one kind or another who know exactly who he is.

Mark 5: 21-43

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³ and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” ²⁴ So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made

well.”²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” ³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

³⁵ While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” ³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The leader of a Synagogue falls to the ground at the feet of Jesus because he knows who Jesus is. The woman says, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Because she knows who Jesus is.

And when you know who he is, you know who you are. Who are you?

The curious adult asks the child, “What will you be when you grow up?”, as if it isn’t enough just to be. But the adult has found that who we are is defined by what we do.

It’s how we introduce ourselves to one another. “Tell me what is it that you do? “I’m a dessert chef.” “Oh!” “I’m an orthopedic surgeon.” “Oh”. “I’m an exotic dancer.” Oh! “I sell extended car warranties.” Oh! You see how it works.

A human being is a complete mystery, but how a person answers, “What do you do?”, answers a lot of questions. We come to some understanding of what a person values, how smart a person is, where a person lives, how much money they make. “Let me know what I’m dealing with here. What do you do?”

“Oh, you’re a money manager.” And the mind says, “Money manager, nice home, Mercedes in the driveway.” “Yes, I’m Chair of Nasdaq.” Suddenly his home has quadrupled in size and number, and the Mercedes has a driver. Here is someone who has power and authority, a success. You’re not just talking to just anyone here. Wow! Here’s someone who has done more with his life than you’ve done with yours.

Success. “Wow! Yes. Of course, I know who you are... you’re ... Bernie, Bernie Madoff.”

Our profession does not define who we are.

Mark introduces a man by what he does, “He’s a leader of Synagogue.” What comes to mind is that he is at the center of town, physically and metaphorically. He is the man of the cloth, theologically trained, he has an answer for everything. He speaks the word of God. But there he is - completely unglued, on his knees. The leader of the synagogue has found himself worshipping at the feet of Jesus.

Our profession does not define who we are.

As the visitor to the Wednesday morning Bible Study said this week, “I lost my job and now I’m on a quest to discover who I really am.” Who are you?

The next character in our story is introduced by how she suffers. “Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.

Well, that’s another way we define someone. “She has cancer.” “He has lost his memory.” I remember a woman in my congregation in Durham, a brilliant writer, and she had a massive stroke. She could hardly speak. I remember visiting her in the nursing home and trying not to talk to her like she was a two-year old. I knew who she was. I would tell the nurses about her. “June, how are you today? It’s a nice day.” I struggled to keep her brilliance. How we suffer does not define us.

What we do, how we look, our trials, our errors – they tend to define us. And because of that, we are often misunderstood. And there’s nothing that makes us sadder than being misunderstood. When you’re the one who is blamed. When your decision is questioned. When your friend forgets to call. When your pastor doesn’t see you. When the church doesn’t even send a note. “Don’t they understand?” Nothing makes us as sad as being misunderstood. Nothing makes us so mad as being misunderstood. “He doesn’t know what he’s dealing with here.”

Who are you? You are a complicated creature. “Fearfully and wonderfully made.” Complicated!

And what’s frightening about being complicated is that the simplistic boxes we use to find out who we are just don’t work anymore.

What’s your name? I’m more than a name.

What’s your occupation? I’m retired. I’m more than my occupation.

What's your sex? The boxes of male and female don't work anymore. Her parents threw her out and burned her clothes.

What's your religion? Muslim? Hindu? Attend only at Christmas? Spiritual but not religious? Attend every week, but your mind is on the game that starts at noon? Presbyterian with a hint of Buddha on the side? Catholic, but married into this church? A leader of the synagogue, but I'm crying at the feet of Jesus.

A woman who hasn't been to worship in a very long time said, "They wouldn't let me in. I'm not pure enough. I have this disease. They know my suffering and they do not want me." To tell you the truth, if that's the god they worship, I don't need that god. Who are you?

I believe the human condition is the same the world over. Who you are is someone who is misunderstood at times. Who you are is someone who wants to be heard. Who you are is someone who needs a little appreciation from time to time. Who you are is someone who is sick and tired of being sick and tired. Who you are is someone who's a little scared to see the doctor. Who you are is a little worried about whether you have enough. Who you are hurts a bit, hurts a lot. Who you are is someone who doesn't know who you are. It's just how we're created.

The human condition is the same the world over. And I think if we could create a creator; that is, if we could build a god, we would build a god who understands us.

I'd make a god who understands me. I'd make a god who truly understands why I did what I did and do what I do. I'd make a god who doesn't jump to conclusions. I'd make a god who will give me some space from time to time, and some time from time to time. I'd make a god that doesn't require groveling. I'd make a god that doesn't try to make me into something I can never be. I'd make a god of abundance, whose desire is to hand it over. I'd make a god with more love, more grace, more hope, kindness, patience, time. If I could create a god, I'd make a god that could be busy with a billion things, but if I needed anything, I could just reach out my hand and touch... just touch the hem of his garment...

Who touched me?

"Teacher, you see the crowds pressing on you, how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" "No. No. Someone knows who I am, and I've hungered for this. I've thirsted for this. Don't you understand the most painful thing is to be misunderstood? I carry the wounds of misunderstanding, but someone here knows who I am. Who touched me?"

The human condition is the same, God knows. The desire to be known. The desire to be touched. The desire to be known. Who touched me? In that moment, heaven and earth connect and the one who is well made is also the one who is made well. And it is who you are.