

## Contexts

### Mark's Gospel

- Composed between 65-70 CE
- Generally accepted as the first Gospel written.
- Authorship is unclear but possibly written by John Mark, the companion of Peter in Rome.
- Begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness, then the Baptism of Jesus, then Jesus battling the forces of evil in the wilderness.
- First action of Jesus is to establish a community to establish the kingdom of God.
- Major work of this community is the work of healing and restoring God's right order, as opposed to the order of Rome, or the order established by the scribes and Pharisees, or religious and cultural norms of the time.
- Cleansing & healing stories restore people to their proper (rightful) place in the Kingdom and in human society (no longer outcasts, despised, unclean, etc).
- The right order of God's kingdom shatters and goes beyond the human and religious limitations placed on some of God's beloved sons and daughters.
- There is a characteristic starkness in Mark's Gospel – it is the shortest of the 4 canonical Gospels.
- Often the story is told by contrast – who is truly blind: the blind beggar or the seeing disciples, etc.

### Mark 5:21-43 – things to notice

- Follows the passage about the calming of the storm and involves restoration of life & healing the sick (Jairus' daughter & the woman with the haemorrhage).
- After calming the storm Jesus and the disciples arrive at the other side of the lake and are met by a large crowd.
- Note Mark's use of the 'sandwich' – the passage begins with an urgent call to Jesus to cure a very ill little girl. Then the scene switches to the cure of the woman with the haemorrhage, then switches back to the cure of the little girl.
- A synagogue official (Jairus) approaches Jesus and makes an urgent request for him to come and save her. Our translation says that his daughter is 'desperately sick' but the Greek says 'my daughter is nearing the end'.
- Note: in contrast to other Jewish officials and leaders, Jairus believes (has faith in) in Jesus' power.
- Note that women are the focus of both healings in this passage. Both women are ritually unclean – the woman because of her haemorrhage and the little girl's corpse.
- Jesus, accompanied by the crowd, sets out towards Jairus' house when Mark inserts the story about the woman with the haemorrhage. She, too, has faith in Jesus, "If I can just touch his clothes I will be well again." The woman overcomes her social and religious inhibitions and touches Jesus clothes.
- Her cure is instant as is Jesus' awareness that 'power had gone out of him'. Note that Jesus has not spoken and has not touched the woman, yet she is cured.
- He asks "Who touched me?" The disciples respond, 'Don't be silly, look at how many people are crowding around you'. But Jesus is not diverted. He wants to meet the woman. Faith brings about relationship with God.
- The woman comes forward 'frightened and trembling', not because she is afraid, but because she is overcome with what has happened to her.
- Jesus pronounces the cure and admires her faith.

- People arrive to tell Jairus that his daughter has died and not to trouble Jesus further. But Jesus hears this and calls Jairus to deeper faith. Again, Jesus is not diverted from his task of showing forth the healing which comes from God.
- This time only Peter, James and John (the inner circle) accompany Jesus. The crowd mocks Jesus' assertion that the little girl is not dead, but asleep. He sends the mockers away.
- It is difficult to know what to make of Jesus' reference to the girl being 'asleep'.
- Now only the girl's father and mother and Peter, James and John are present.
- Not the gentle gesture of Jesus taking the girl by the hand.
- He tells the girl to 'rise' – note: this is not the translation in the text. He does not tell her to 'get up' but to 'rise' – Mark will use exactly this term to describe Jesus' resurrection from the dead.
- Immediately, the girl 'rises' and walks – proving she is alive.
- Those present are amazed (as you would expect). Jesus tells them not to tell anyone what has happened. Probably, this is part of Mark's emphasis on the correct understanding of Jesus' messiahship which will only be revealed on the cross.
- Note the similarities between the two women: both have been ill for some time; the woman has suffered for 12 years, the girl is 12 years old, both are (in different ways) 'at the end of their tether'. Note also the contrast: one is a woman, one is a girl.
- Jesus tells them to give the girl something to eat – this confirms the healing and is also a very warm act of compassion. If the girl has been very ill for some time it is unlikely that she could eat. Her parents, overcome with joy at her healing, may well have forgotten to feed her. Jesus is very aware of the girl's condition and of her needs, whereas those around her are not.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on for this Sunday ?

The first reading comes from the book of Wisdom. It is a short passage which affirms the fact that God did not make death and takes no pleasure in death. Death is the work of the devil and his partners. God's intention is always for healing and life. It is easy to see why it was chosen to go with today's Gospel. Jesus is God's primary minister of health and life as today's Gospel shows.

### Reflection

Note that this passage has 2 stories of faith – Jairus' story and the woman's story.

Remember that 'faith' in the Gospels is about relationship with Jesus, not about believing ideas. Fledgling faith leads to greater relationship. Note how the relationship between Jesus and Jairus and Jesus and the woman grows and develops through the dialogue in the story.

Jesus enters into relationship with both.

In this Sunday's gospel Mark presents two stories of healing and restoration worked by Jesus for two women. One is a mature woman suffering from a haemorrhage for a long time, and the other is a young girl who has just died.

Over the last few Sundays Mark has been showing us the reign of God's grace (the Kingdom of God) at work in the person of Jesus. In the calming of the storm Mark has already insisted that it is necessary to have faith in Jesus in order to enter into the Kingdom.

Faith is about entering into relationship with Jesus. It is not the work of the mind but of the heart.

With an honesty born out of desperation Jairus and the woman seek out Jesus and begin their relationship with him. Jesus responds to both, and the dialogue between them grows. Even death is not an obstacle to the kindness of God. Jesus is God's healing for death itself (the Way to eternal life).

In this passage Mark is suggesting that the way to find the healing and life we need is to enter into a faithful relationship with Jesus. In that relationship (as in all others of value) the conversation is not one-way – it is a loving dialogue between two hearts.

Faith in Jesus – forming a relationship with him – brings about healing and restoration for us as God's beloved sons and daughters. We are restored to our rightful place in God's kingdom. Two women once considered unclean because of blood and death are now healed and restored to their rightful places in their families, communities and religious practices.

Another reason why Mark tells this story is because of the problem between the Jewish and Gentile converts in his community. Some Jewish Christians who continued to hold fast to ideas about what made people clean or unclean in the sight of God could hardly bear to worship alongside pagans whom they considered unclean. This story showed them that Jesus wasn't concerned about the women being ritually unclean and that the kindness of God was meant for all.

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Through the healing and life we receive in our relationship with Jesus we become a source of healing and life for those around us.

### Women in the Gospels

In New Testament times, women were marginalized for the simple fact that they were women (cf. Lv 15: 19-27; 12: 1-5). Women did not take part in the public life of the synagogue and they could not be witnesses. That is why many women put up resistance to such exclusion. Even in Esdra's time, when the marginalization of women was greater, (cf. Esd 9: 1-2; 10: 2-3), resistance grew, as in the cases of Judith, Esther, Ruth, Noemi, Susannah, the Sulamite woman and others. This resistance is echoed in and welcomed by Jesus. Here are some examples of non-conformity and of resistance of women in daily life and Jesus' acceptance of them:

The prostitute has the courage to challenge the laws of society and religion. She enters the house of a Pharisee to meet Jesus. When she meets him, she meets love and forgiveness and is defended against the Pharisees.

The woman bent double does not even hear the shouts of the chief of the synagogue. She wants to be healed, even though it is the Sabbath. Jesus welcomes her as a daughter and defends her against the chief of the synagogue (Lk 13: 10-17).

The woman considered impure because she was losing blood, has the courage to go in the middle of the crowd and to think just the opposite of what the official doctrine taught. The official doctrine said: "Anyone who touches her will be impure!" But she said: "If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved!" (Mk 5: 28). She is not censured and is healed. Jesus says that her healing is the fruit of faith (Mk 5: 25-34).

The Samaritan woman, who is despised and considered heretical, has the courage to approach Jesus and to change the direction of the conversation started by him (cf. Jn 4: 19, 25). In John's Gospel, she is the first person to hear the secret that Jesus is the Messiah (Jn 4: 26).

The gentile woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon does not accept her exclusion and speaks in such a manner as to make Jesus listen to her (Mk 7: 24-30).

The mothers with little children challenge the disciples and are welcomed and blessed by Jesus (Mt 19: 13-15; Mk 10: 13-16).

The women who challenged the authorities and stayed at the foot of the cross of Jesus (Mk 15: 40; Mt 27: 55-56, 61), were also the first to experience the presence of Jesus after the resurrection (Mk 16: 5-8; Mt 28: 9-10). Among them was Mary Magdalene who was considered to have been possessed by evil spirits and was healed by Jesus (Lk, 8: 2). She was given the order to pass on the Good News of the resurrection to the apostles (Jn 20: 16-18). Mark says that "they used to *follow* him and *look after* him when he was in Galilee. And many other women were there who had *come up* to Jerusalem with him" (Mk 15: 41). Mark uses three important words to define the life of these women: follow, look after, come up to Jerusalem. These three words describe the ideal disciple. They represent the model for the other disciples who had fled!

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