

Loving – healing, God in heaven, give your children a faith like the courageous, desperate, unclean woman. Help us believe like Jairus, who despaired for his daughter’s life. Amen.

I wonder if you can guess what I have in this bag.

It has a bunch of buttons on it. They help you do any number of things. If you are either especially blessed or extraordinarily cursed, depending upon your world view, you might own more than one of them. If you belong to a household that includes both a man and a woman, then conventional wisdom tells us that the man of the house will put more stock in this item than will the woman. It can bring you the news, the latest gossip or the World Cup.

If you are blessed, or cursed, to have one of these things in your house, then you might have contracted the late-20th Century or early 21st Century habit of channel-surfing. Most of you probably know what channel surfing is: When you get bored with the television show that you’re watching, you pick up the trusty remote – hopefully the correct one – and begin to surf. With the press of our thumb we can scan through dozens and dozens, even hundreds of TV shows, movies, and sporting events.

It can get a little hard to keep up sometimes, especially if someone else has control of the remote. Just when your might be hooked into the plot of the latest “reality” show, someone starts to surf, and you find yourself in the middle of a soccer match or tennis tournament.

At first glance, it might feel like that’s what Mark is up to today in the gospel reading.

First he grabs you with the high drama of an episode of ER. A little girl is so sick that’s she about to die. If Mark can just get Jesus through the crowd, and over to the house of Jairus he might get there in time. You can bet that Jairus begins to pull, push and shove Jesus through the crowd.

And suddenly – Mark goes channel surfing. We find ourselves in the middle of another story.

A woman appears, with an entirely new story. We aren’t given her name, but we are given some good character development. But what, we ask ourselves, what is Mark up to? Why didn’t he finish the first episode before throwing us this curve ball?

What Mark is doing is called “a Markan Sandwich”.

He does this quite a few times in his narrative of the life and times of Jesus.

Mark will begin a story, interrupt the plot with the introduction a new story that doesn’t appear to relate, and then return to the first story.

The Gospel of Mark is considered to be the first surviving story of Jesus’ life that was reduced to writing and preserved by the early church. But that doesn’t mean that it is primitive, less sophisticated or less well constructed. In the use of these sandwiched tales, Mark has left a legacy of richly developed lessons and examples from Jesus. That’s especially true of today’s sandwich.

Today’s gospel reading presents us with some stunning contrasts.

First there is Jairus. He’s the leader of his faith community. A community that the gospels tell us wasn’t exactly

enamored with Jesus.

They didn't much like who he hung out with. They didn't like who he ate with. And they were more than a little suspicious that Jesus didn't pay as much attention to the purity codes as he probably should have.

But push had come to shove for Jairus. He was willing to risk both his reputation and his standing in the community. His little girl was dying. So he fell at the feet of Jesus, and repeatedly begged, saying over and over again, *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.*

Then there's the woman. Someone with no reputation, except a bad one. Someone with no standing in the community, except to stand outside. And as is all too often the case in Scripture, we don't even know her name. But we do know an awful lot about her. Given the purity codes of *our own time*, we are given almost an embarrassing amount of information.

If Jairus was on top of the community pecking order, the woman was at the bottom. Her life had been very neatly defined by the purity code established in the Book of Leviticus. She was permanently unclean. There was nothing she could do to redeem herself. Not only that, she's broke. She is beyond poor. The poor can beg. She can't even do that, because she's not supposed to be out in polite society.

She's been to every medicine man, doctor, specialist, quack and witch doctor she can find. They've all taken all of her money. And all that's she's gotten – is worse.

Jairus talked directly to Jesus on behalf of his little girl.

The woman has no one to speak on her behalf. Actually, she's described at first talking only to herself. In fact it's one of the very, very few examples of an 'internal dialogue' in either the Hebrew Scriptures or the Christian Testament.

Jairus publicly asks Jesus to come to his daughter and lay hands on her, so that she can get better and live.

In contrast, the woman sneaks behind Jesus hidden in the crowd. Breaking every religious, moral, and social taboo – she touches Jesus. And by that act – by touching Jesus, she sets the stage for Jesus to turn our neat and tidy religious and social order upside down.

That's why we have a Markan sandwich, and not just one story that's split into two parts with another story stuck in the middle.

What we have in the gospel today is a story about faith.

For all her muttering and mumbling to herself, the woman had faith. If she could touch Jesus, she would be healed. For all that his position and his prestige and his power gave him, Jairus believed that his little girl would get better, and live.

One thing that the woman and Jairus had in common – they were both stuck in the crowd. The woman was stuck by her need to hide in the crowd. Jairus was delayed in his attempt to bring Jesus to his little girl's bedside, by the same crowd.

Two very different people. Separated from access to the healing power of God – they thought – by the crowd.

Many of us have been stuck in that crowd. Or at least there have probably been times in our lives it has felt that way. The of us who are rich, those of us who are poor; those of us with a voice, those of us without a voice; those of us at the top of the social order, those of us who have been declared by others to be unclean.

Which of us, at one time or another, not been the one who bleeds, the one who has been broken, excluded, made invisible, marginalized?ⁱ

The crowd could not separate the hemorrhaging woman from having the faith to touch Jesus.

And neither would Jairus be separated from his Jesus by his pride, his position, or his culture.

So as we continue with Mark through his telling of the Good News of Jesus Christ, keep your ears and your eyes open for the next sandwich. It probably won't be a case of bad editing, or a case of 1st Century channel surfing. It will likely be because Mark has an important lesson to teach us

For me at least, the lesson today is that God is available.

Ready to be touched by any one of us who pushes our way through the crowd of distractions, rules and prejudices that think they can separate us from the love of God.

Because nothing – not death, not life, not angels, not rulers, not things present, not things to come, not powers, not heights, not depths.

Nothing – nothing – nothing – absolutely nothing - can separate us from the love of God.

ⁱ Myers, Ched, et al. *Say to this Mountain, Mark's Story of Discipleship*. Orbis, 2000. page 67