

Today in our Gospel lesson we have another Marcan Sandwich. I talked about these a few weeks ago.

A Marcan Sandwich is a literary device Mark loves to use in his Gospel. It's structured like an Oreo—two outside "cookies" and some "filling" in the middle. Mark loves this structure. Introduce topic A. Switch to topic B. And then come back to topic A. And let topics A and B play off of each other. Compare and contrast.

What we have in this Marcan Sandwich is a double miracle. Two women. A young twelve year old girl who is dying. And a woman who has been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.

My eye gets drawn to the twelve year old girl and her father, probably because he is a religious leader.

His name is Jairus. He's the local synagogue president. Jairus is the lay administrative and organizational head of that synagogue. This makes him a rather important person in the Jewish community. People look up to him. He carries great prestige and status. People look to him for leadership and guidance and answers.

But Jairus has a 12 year old daughter who is dying. And there's nothing Jairus can do about it. His status and his prestige count for nothing in this case. He has no control over the situation. Zip, zero, nada. And so, Jairus does an amazing thing. He goes to Jesus.

Now Jesus is not very popular with the Jewish leaders. They regard Jesus as something of a heretic. For Jairus to go to Jesus for help is probably career suicide. But Jairus ignores that and goes anyway.

Jairus has an esteemed and honored place in the community. Jairus' social standing is much higher than Jesus'. The social standing of a synagogue president is much more prestigious than that of a simple carpenter turned travelling teacher. But Jairus ignores protocol, and throws himself in the dirt at Jesus' feet. And he begs Jesus to come and help his daughter.

The way he phrases it is so sad. He says, "My little daughter is at the point of death."¹

Now the girl is 12 years old. She's almost an adult in that culture. But Jairus' uses a term which implies that she is a young child, a preschooler. Apparently, she's still 'Daddy's Little Girl' in his eyes. So he begs Jesus, "Come, lay your hands on her, that she may be made well and live."² And Jesus agrees, and goes with him.

That's part A, that's the first cookie in the Marcan Oreo sandwich.

¹ Mark 5:23

² Mark 5:23

And then we get part B.

As they're heading to Jairus's house, a woman interrupts them.

We're told that she's been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. It was probably some sort of chronic uterine bleeding. Now you might think, "My that's unfortunate." But there's much more to her condition than that.

Do you know what 12 years of chronic bleeding would mean in a first century Jewish culture? Blood was ritually unclean. Anyone who came into contact with blood became ritually unclean. They would be disqualified for a period of going to holy places or touching holy things.

And the thing about uncleanness is, it's contagious. If something's unclean, and you touch it, you become unclean. Then if you touch something it becomes unclean, and if someone else touches that, then they become unclean.

We might think that's a bit kooky. But we're careful with blood these days. What's the modern protocol around blood? Bleach and latex gloves. We know that blood can be dangerous.

We also have the expression, "One bad apple can spoil the whole barrel." We talk about the danger of falling in with the wrong crowd. We know that certain bad things can contaminate other things. That was the Jewish view when it came to blood. That's all well and good in theory. But think what it meant for the poor Hemorrhagic Woman.

The woman has been bleeding for 12 years. That meant that no one in her family could touch her. They couldn't give her a hug or a kiss. For 12 years!

And so she must be desperate for a cure. Mark says she went to every physician around and spent all she had on cures, but she didn't get any better. And then, one day, she sees Jesus passing by.

Mark says, that she comes up behind Jesus in the crowd and touches his clothes. Mark says that she said to herself,

"If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."³

And immediately, Mark says, her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease."

Notice what's happening here. With Jesus, things are working backwards. Her touch should have made Jesus unclean. But the opposite happens. Jesus' holiness makes her whole. Jesus infects her and contaminates her with his life and power. The one holy apple makes the whole rotten barrel good.

³ Mk 5:28

Then Jesus says,
"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."⁴

Notice that word. Daughter. A word of relationship. She had been in isolation because of her bleeding. But now she is given a new relationship with the one who healed her.

And notice what Jesus commends. Her faith.

It is by her faith that she reaches out to receive the holy and healing touch of Jesus. That's part B of the Marcan Sandwich. Then we go back to Jairus and part A.

Now, I would imagine Jairus must be freaking out with this delay. The lady has waited 12 years. 'Can't she wait 30 minutes more? Why is she interrupting things now? My daughter is dying!'

And then, to top it off, as they start moving again, some people come up to Jairus say, "Your daughter is already dead. Don't bother the teacher anymore."⁵

It's too late. Jesus might be able to heal the sick. But now, the girl is past healing. She's dead.

But just as Jairus' feet are getting knocked out from under him, the voice of Jesus comes with reassurance. You can just feel the care and concern in his voice. Jairus's whole world is collapsing. But Jesus speaks to him lovingly, "Do not fear, only believe."⁶

Don't fear. Trust. Have faith. The same term used with the woman. And with that, Jesus and Jairus, along with the inner circle of the disciples, Peter, James and John, all set off for Jairus' house.

At the house, all of the friends and neighbors have gathered to weep and wail. Jesus tells them to stop it. And I can just see Jesus turning to Jairus and putting a hand on his shoulder. Then Jesus says, "The child is not dead but sleeping."⁷

The crowd laughs in his face. They know what death is. Besides, Jesus hasn't even seen the girl. And who does he think he is anyway?

But from Jesus' standpoint, though he knows the girl is dead, he also knows that he will awaken her from death as if from sleep.

⁴ Mk 5:34

⁵ Mk 5:35

⁶ Mk 5:36

⁷ Mk 5:39

So Jesus takes the parents and his 3 disciples with him into the girl's room. And he says to her, "Talitha cum,"⁸ which means, 'Little girl, arise.' And the girl gets up, alive.

Jairus went to Jesus out of desperation, asking him to heal his daughter. And he receives much more than he expected. He receives his daughter back from the dead.

Now I don't want to give you some snow job this morning. I'm not going to tell you that everything always turns out for the best. That just ain't so. Sometimes faithful parents have problems anyway. Some children are born with debilitating conditions. And sometimes parents have to bury their children. And some wonderful people have to suffer from chronic conditions for years and years. It doesn't seem fair, but it does happen.

God is not a vending machine, to give us everything we want on demand.

But at the same time, we mustn't miss the wonderful sense of hope in the stories of Jairus and the hemorrhagic woman.

Jairus puts everything on the line to go to Jesus. And when his daughter dies, it looks like he has made a bad call. After his daughter's death, he figures that there was nothing Jesus could do. But he figures wrong.

The hemorrhagic woman is also out of other options. She had tried every possible cure to stop her bleeding. And then she reaches out to Jesus.

She reaches out, and Jesus heals her. In a real way he "infects" her with health. She is healed of her hemorrhage. She is healed of her fear. She is healed of the isolation.

Jesus does the same thing to Jairus' daughter too. Jesus touches her, and he "infects" her with life. His life brings her back from death.

If you feel out of step with those around you, let Jesus touch you.

If you feel lonely or isolated, reach out to him.

If you need wholeness or holiness in your life, let him infect you.

If you feel estranged or separated from God, let him call you daughter or son.

Come to him in faith. And let him touch your life.

Come to his table. Reach out. And let him infect you with his presence. Let him fill you with his life.

⁸ Mk 5:41