



A FAMILY OF TWELVE: A NEW CREATION

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 Mark 5:21-43
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One of the deepest longings of the human soul is the desire to belong. Everyone feels the need to belong to a family, a community, a nation. This need is coming in for a lot of attention these days, because in our fragmented world there are fewer and fewer families and communities where "belonging" is safe. Yet the need persists, and when it is denied, the ramifications can be devastating. What drives an adolescent to arm himself with semi-automatic weapons and turn his school cafeteria into a bleeding Bosnia? What drives teenagers into easy sex and alcohol? Often-times these things are not indulged for the sake of pleasure, but, rather, to numb the pain of isolation and rejection. Usually, the greater the rejection, the more extreme the behavior.

The apostle Paul well understood this need to belong. He told the Galatian Christians the reason they were walking away from freedom and returning to the tyranny of legalism had nothing to do with theology; it came from the feeling of being shut out by their friends. "They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them" (Gal 4:17), wrote Paul.

No one had a more acute understanding of the need to belong than Jesus of Galilee. He was rejected by his family, his nation and, ultimately, his God. Out of the ache of that rejection his task was to create a new family and a new nation, one in which, in the words of Isaiah, "the wolf and the lamb shall graze together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain" (Isa 65:25).

If you feel alone today and are looking for a safe place to belong, then this text from the gospel of Mark, which tells the story of that new creation, is for you.

I. A Distraught Father (Mark 5:21-23)

And when Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered about Him; and He stayed by the seashore. And one of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and upon seeing Him, fell at His feet, and entreated Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, that she may get well and live." (NASB)

In our last study in Mark we saw Jesus driving a legion of demons out from a demoniac and into a herd of two thousand pigs, which galloped headlong off a cliff to be drowned into the sea. The scene was like a new Exodus. People were caught in awe and wonder. But surprisingly, when the townspeople discovered the financial cost of healing the demoniac, they abruptly asked Jesus to leave.

Operating under the strict guideline that God's kingdom is never to be coerced, Jesus departed, but not before he had secretly planted a small seed in that hostile soil—the man from whom he had cast out a legion of demons. He commissioned him to tell his story throughout the ten cities of the Decapolis. Though he appeared insignificant in the midst of that thriving culture, the former demoniac was like a mustard seed which would bear much fruit and become an influential tree in God's garden.

Returning to the northwestern side of the lake now, Jesus finds a large crowd awaiting him. The people press in on him, demonstrating the magnetism he continued to evoke. From out of the crowd emerges a leader in this Jewish community, a "synagogue official." The word is a technical term for "the lay official responsible for the supervision of the synagogue building and the arrangements for the services."¹ The man's Hebrew name, Jairus, can mean either "he will enlighten," or "he will *arouse* or *awake*"—a subtle preview of what is to come.

Jairus is so filled with anxiety for his daughter that upon seeing Jesus he immediately casts all dignity aside and falls at his feet. With grief-stricken urgency he pleads with Jesus for the life of his precious little girl, who is at death's door. There was enough evidence around Galilee to convince this Jew that if Jesus would but come and lay his hands on her she would be healed of her affliction. Such a scene grips the heart of any parent who has been in similar circumstances. When the life of your child is threatened, your world collapses, your insides cave in, and your resolve is fortified to risk everything for your child.

But the language here reveals that Mark wants us to see more in this than the rescuing of a physical life. Gundry notes that Mark's use of the terms "be saved" and "live," instead of the more common "be healed" or "be cured," "carry overtones of a larger salvation that includes eternal life."² How it must have amazed the crowd to see the ruler of the synagogue falling at the feet of this carpenter and entreating him with such passion for things a Jew would only entreat Yahweh at the temple. We ought to find it no less amazing. Such a scene should make us want to ask, "Who is this carpenter?"

II. An Unclean Woman (Mark 5:24-34)

And He went off with him; and a great multitude was following Him and *pressing* in on Him. And a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse, after hearing about Jesus, came up in the crowd behind Him, and *touched* His

cloak. For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I shall get well." And immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. (5:24-29)

So critical is the condition of the girl, Mark records no verbal response from Jesus, only decisive, immediate action: "And He went away with him." As Jesus and Jairus take off in tandem, like an ambulance fixed on a rescue mission, the multitude press in on Jesus from every side. In their midst is another victim of circumstance. Mark's lengthy description of this unnamed woman interrupts our journey, causing us to slow down and linger over her condition.

Present in that surging crowd was one who for twelve years had been crippled by a hemorrhage. She had spent all her wealth seeking a cure, but her condition grew worse. Not only was she physically hampered and psychologically humiliated at the hands of physicians, the cleanliness laws in Israel (Lev 15:25-30) rendered her unclean as long her condition lasted. Her bed, her garments, anything she sat on became unclean, as did anyone with whom she came in contact. During twelve years of pain, humiliation and isolation, she was cut off from all community and worship.

Only in the last several years have I come to understand the power of uncleanness as I have listened to the stories of women who had suffered sexual abuse. I learned it wasn't the life-threatening danger that lived on to haunt these women; rather, it was the shame of uncleanness left in the wake of the violation. They had been defiled in the very area that is most sacred, the very springs of life. Their shame had walled them up in silence and seclusion, a shame that would re-enter the privacy of their locked souls unannounced, and relentlessly torment them day and night in the reenactment of the horror they had suffered.

Mark's graphic description draws us into this woman's story and evokes our empathy. But, as we observe even more carefully, we get the impression that Mark paints her condition as symbolic of the nation of Israel. Her ailment had lasted for twelve years, the same number as the tribes of Israel. Further, the adjectives he uses to describe her were used by the prophet Isaiah of the uncleanness that had brought about Israel's exile:

**"For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;
And all of us wither like a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
And there is no one who calls on your name,
Who arouses himself to take hold of You." (Isa 64:6-7)**

Is this Mark's way of saying the woman's condition was the condition of all Israel? Perhaps. The last two verbs, "arouse," and "to take hold of," prefigure the story of Jairus, who will "arouse" himself to find Jesus, and the woman, who "will take hold of" his garment.

Another thing that is intriguing about this story is the woman's faith. She believes so strongly in the power residing in Christ, she feels that just one touch of his garment will make her clean. This is new theology in Israel! Rather

than Jesus being made unclean by the touch of her uncleanness, his holiness is so powerful, his life so full of God's Spirit, that just one touch of his garment will make her clean! Here is the birth of a new age, one in which holiness is so intensified that just one touch of the holy makes the foulest thing clean. This has tremendous implications for the church. Why should we fear the infiltration of the world? It is the world that should fear Christians' infiltration into their arena, because everything we touch becomes holy!

So, with one touch of Jesus' garment, the woman's fountain of blood is immediately dried up. Mark intensifies the description of her malady, from "flow" to "fountain" and then to "affliction"—literally "whip, scourge, affliction," to "emphasize the severity of her condition and thus magnify Jesus' power"³ to heal her.

And immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" And His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. But the woman, fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction." (5:30-34)

Immediately the woman touches his garment, Jesus becomes aware that the power residing in him has gone out of him. This was not magic. As Cranfield writes: "There is nothing here inconsistent with the fact that the power residing in, and issuing from, Jesus, is the personal power of the personal God. Though Jesus does not himself make a decision in this case, nevertheless God does. God controls his own power. He knows about the woman and wills to honor her faith in the efficacy of his power active in Jesus, even though her faith is no doubt very imperfect...The cure does not happen automatically, but by God's free and personal decision."⁴

Jesus seeks out the woman, not to make the miracle known, but to perfect the imperfect faith of the one who had touched him. He does not want to heal or help someone without sealing the relationship. In the same way, Jesus is never too busy or in too great a hurry to deal with us, for our relationship to him is more important than solving the problems we bring to him. This has great implications for the church in this day of mass production mentality.

So Jesus stops the mission and asks, "Who touched my garment?" The disciples are dumbfounded by his question. "You see the whole crowd pressing in on you, and you ask, 'Who touched me?'" they say. Yes, many were touching him, but only one touch had faith. O God, give us that faith! How often has Jesus been in our midst and we have rubbed against him and walked alongside him, but never reached out to seize him in faith!

Sensing she has been discovered, the woman is overcome with awe and fear, a fear that strangely repels and draws her at the same time. But the look of acceptance in

Jesus' eyes makes her feel so safe and accepted that the tension is relieved. She casts herself at his feet and tells all, holding nothing back—nothing of her affliction, her sordid story, her uncleanness; it is all out in the open. And with that full confession, she becomes a member of the new family. This is a very important aspect to our being healed. As we have already seen, healing is done in community.

Jesus seals the relationship with even more blessing. He says to the woman, "*Daughter*, your faith has saved you; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction." *Daughter*, that most precious of titles, the one that had evoked the most precious tears in Jairus, becomes the woman's gift. *Daughter*. How I love that title. The shame that once secluded and silenced her now vanishes like dew under the heat of day. That one touch of faith has granted her eternal blessings of salvation, *shalom*, and complete restoration.

But, while Jesus' sensitive, attentive response to the woman's tender touch brought her immeasurable blessing, Jairus is left with no little anxiety. What would you think of being in an ambulance that was carrying your dying daughter and having it suddenly stop to give aid to another accident victim?

III. A Dead Daughter (Mark 5:35-43)

While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid, only believe." And He allowed no one to follow with Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. (5:35-37)

Jesus hasn't even finished conversing with the woman when the worst possible news is brought to the anxious Jairus. It was a parent's worst nightmare: "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" But Jesus, overhearing the question, encourages the synagogue official to be like the woman—to stop fearing and continue believing. The verbs are present tense, suggesting not a one time action, but a steady, persevering attitude. For just as the severity of the woman's condition and the loss of hope in man to help is what thrust her faith upon Jesus, so now Jairus' destitute condition is what should encourage him to continue to believe and overcome his fears.

Separating himself from the crowd, Jesus goes on with only Jairus and three of the disciples, Peter, James, and John, the same three who will witness the transfiguration and Gethsemane. Verse 38:

And they came to the house of the synagogue official; and He beheld a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. And entering in, He said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. And taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!"). And immediately the girl rose and began to walk; for she was twelve years old. And immediately

they were completely astounded. And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this; and He said that something should be given her to eat. (5:38-43)

They find the home of Jairus in an uproar, overrun with grief, emotion, and loud wailing. Jesus enters and, with a word, calms the sea of emotion: "Why make a commotion, the little child has not died [she is alive], but is sleeping [and will wake up]." But he hasn't even seen the girl. How can he make such a diagnosis? They laugh at him. In the face of their mocking laughter, however, Jesus immediately takes command of the situation. He clears the house of all but the little girl's parents, enters her room and takes her by the hand. With but two words, "*Talitha kum*" ("little girl arise"), she rises from the dead. Her cure is as immediate as that of the hemorrhaging woman. *Talitha kum*: two Aramaic words which the disciples would never forget. *Talitha* is a very affectionate term which can mean "little lamb" or "child." It is found in a poetic description of Israel's future shepherd who "gathers the lambs with his arm and in his bosom he will carry them"⁵ (Isa 40:11; see also Mark 6:34). That future shepherd for whom Israel had so longed to lead her out of exile had arrived.

At this point we learn that the girl is twelve years old. Now she is awake and walking in newness of life. The home which was once overcome with grief is now awash with awe—the same astonishment that overcame the disciples when Jesus calmed the sea. He commands the witnesses to secrecy, and instructs them to feed the girl before the people outside discover she is alive and begin to inundate her with questions. Jesus then wants to delay the discovery "so as to get away from the large crowd that have been crushing him," lest now hearing this report, "he might be thronged to death."⁶

So what is Mark, the master storyteller, telling us about Jesus, and about our journey of faith in the kingdom of God?

IV. The Implications of our Story

A. Who is this Jesus?

Who is this carpenter turned itinerant prophet wandering around Galilee, stilling storms, commanding demons, and now cleansing the unclean and raising the dead? If we place this story against the backdrop of the book of Isaiah, the picture emerges with amazing clarity. Isaiah concludes with the nation lamenting her condition in exile and crying out to her God:

**"Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock?
Where is He who put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them...
Look down from heaven, and see from Your holy and glorious habitation;
Where are Your zeal and Your mighty deeds?
The stirrings of Your heart and Your compassion are restrained toward me...
Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage." (Isa 63:11, 15, 17)**

In response to that desperate cry, God says he will re-

turn, and when he does, he will not just reform Israel, he will institute a whole new creation:

**“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former things shall not be remembered or
come to mind.**

**But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
For behold I create Jerusalem for rejoicing,
And her people for gladness.**

**I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My peo-
ple;**

**And there will no longer be heard in her
The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.**

**No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a
few days...**

**It will also come to pass that before they call, I will an-
swer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.”
(Isa 65:17-20, 24)**

A careful look at the exquisite tapestry of this story in Mark reveals that Jesus did not merely heal two random lives, but through what appeared to be a tragic delay, he integrated them into one family: a new family made up of a father, who was a synagogue ruler, a woman, and a daughter, a complete family restored around the number twelve.

This new little family is a cameo of an Israel fully restored from her uncleanness (Isa 64:6-7) and death. Mark is saying that God’s response to our plight is not to bring reform, but a brand new creation, and that in the coming of Jesus that new creation has begun. Rikki Watts explains it well:

Jesus is presented as...the one who heals Israel of her uncleanness and, by restoring the child to life, signals the inauguration of the promises of Yahweh’s new creational restoration of Israel. In other words, these miracles bear all the hallmarks of the indicating that, in response to the lament and promise which concludes the book of Isaiah, Yahweh has indeed ‘split the heavens’ (Mk 1:10; Isa 63:19), sent his Holy Spirit among his people (Mk 1:10; 3:22-30; cf. Isa 63:10-14), and come down in Jesus, as the mighty Warrior (Mk 3:27), to inaugurate the [New Exodus].⁷

The question that remains is,

B. How do we enter that new creation?

We enter it by faith. This faith was born and developed in both Jairus and the woman through the agonizing means of delay and death. For the woman, it involved twelve years of waiting, and spending all that she had. For Jairus, the delay was but a few moments, but those seconds seemed like an eternity to this waiting father: they were enough to place his twelve-year old daughter in the grave. In both cases, the delay caused both the woman and Jairus to abandon hope in the world and throw themselves at the feet of Jesus, hoping for a new creation. For Jairus, there was no hope left in the synagogue or the temple. For the woman, there was no money left, and not a physician

who hadn’t abused her. The woman was trusting in the life of Jesus, which was so holy that just one touch transformed her uncleanness into what was holy; and the laws which once excluded became obsolete. For Jairus, with the encouragement of what he had observed in the woman, he would follow Jesus to the grave and out the other side to see his daughter walk in newness of life.

This is how we enter into this new creation: when we lose hope in the world to restore our marriage, wash away our despair, or cleanse our shame. When there is no more hope, and only a new creation will suffice, it is then we thrust ourselves at the feet of Jesus and enter into this new creation. “If any man is in Christ, a new creation!” (2 Cor 5:17).

Finally, we observe in our story what happens as a result of this new creation.

C. What happens as a result of this new creation?

The delay not only developed faith, it integrated people who were once painfully isolated and alone into a family, and the family into a nation (symbolized by the number 12). Our story ends not with three isolated individuals, but a father, mother and daughter, all inescapably joined into one family. And now whenever Jairus gazed into the eyes of his beautiful daughter, he would see the face of this woman, whose faith encouraged him to trust in Christ for a new creation.

Such are God’s amazing ways. He uses the very shame and suffering that once isolated and shut us out from community and worship as tools for creating safe communities. Once we come out into the open and expose our shame, like this woman, our suffering becomes the doorway that integrates us with countless lives in the new family of God, so that individuals are bound into families and families into a nation, the new Israel of God.

“And it will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.” (Isa 65:24)

1. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 183.

2. Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 268.

3. Gundry, *Mark*, 269.

4. Cranfield, *Mark*, 185.

5. This is Richard Schneck’s observation in *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark, I-VIII* (Berkeley: Bibal, 1994), 137-138.

6. Gundry, *Mark*, 277.

7. Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997), 176 fn.

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