

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 5th Sunday After Pentecost, June 28, 2015

A Second Expert Opinion

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June 28, 2015

Mark 5:21-43

Each week, with rare exceptions, I preach from the scripture passages suggested in the scriptural Lectionary. The suggested readings repeat every three years so, when I saw what the Lectionary Gospel reading for today was, after checking my files, I was surprised to find that I had never before preached a sermon on our reading from Mark's Gospel here at Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church. It is a very familiar passage which I would have expected to have discussed previously but, as it turned out, when it last appeared in the Lectionary I was doing a sermon series on evangelism and had deviated from the Lectionary for a few weeks so today I am considering a fresh passage, at least here at Conley Memorial.

As I was gathering my thoughts to address this passage for the first time it came to me that both of the stories related in the passage, the woman with the hemorrhage and the terminally ill daughter of Jarius, are examples of the necessity to obtain a second expert medical opinion, in this case the expert being Jesus.

Conventional medical wisdom at the time said that the woman with the hemorrhage could not be helped, nor could anything be done for the dying girl. Everything medical had been tried for both to no avail.

As is typical of Mark's Gospel, our scripture reading incorporates two stories one of which is interrupted by another story which is completed before the first story is resumed.

Jarius comes to Jesus begging for help with his dying daughter, and before Jesus can do anything, the woman with the hemorrhage appears on the scene and Jesus must address her problem before he can do anything about the dying girl.

Jarius is one of the rulers of the synagogue and the woman is a person who is excluded from the synagogue and the temple because she is ritually unclean --- two totally opposite situations.

In an effort to get a cure, the woman had spent everything she had on doctors and had become impoverished. The “cures” that might have been tried on her were very strange.

One cure of those times was to boil Persian onions in wine, to make her drink this potion, and to say to her, “Cease your discharge.”

Another so-called cure was to smear her with sealing clay of a wine vessel and then tell her to cease the discharge.

Another remedy was to get a barley grain from the dung of a white mule and to eat it. If she held it in her system for one day, her discharge would supposedly cease for one day; if she held it for two days, it would cease for two days; but, if she could hold it for three days, it would cease forever. Such was the kind of treatment that the physicians might have given her.

It is no wonder that in those days, according to Josephus, physicians were not respected. One can even find statements that doctors were destined to hell and advice was given not to live in a town where one of its leading physicians was a citizen.

William Barclay¹ stated that *“Jewish literature is interesting on the subject of doctors. ‘I used to go to the physicians,’ says one person, ‘to be healed, and the more they anointed me with their medicaments, the more my eyes were blinded by the films, until they were totally blinded.’ There is a passage in the Mishnah, which is the written summary of the traditional law, which is talking about the trades that a man may teach his son. ‘Rabbi Judah says: ‘Ass-drivers are most of them wicked, camel-drivers are most of them proper folk, sailors are most of them saintly, the best among physicians is destined for Gehenna....”*

In case you do not recall Gehenna was the burning garbage dump in Jerusalem - -- in other words Hell.

“The physicians had had no success with the treatment of this woman’s case, and she had heard about Jesus. But she had this problem --- her trouble was ... embarrassing ... To state it openly was something she could not face and so she decided to touch Jesus in secret.”

Is it any wonder that the woman needed a second opinion, in the case seeking out Jesus?

For Jarius, he was really fighting the odds. At the time of Christ the mortality rate for children who survived child birth was sixty percent by their mid-teens. Here the young girl was dying and with the state of medical care at the time, as evidenced by the situation of the woman with the hemorrhage, there appeared that nothing could be done for the girl that had not already been tried, so Jarius went for a second expert opinion, that of Jesus.

A devotion in Our Daily Bread² explained the situation this way: *“Jesus’ disciples were accompanying him on an urgent mission when their trip was interrupted. The daughter of Jarius, a ruler of the synagogue, was dying. Time was of the essence, and Jesus was on his way to their home. Then, suddenly, Jesus stopped and said ‘Who touched my clothes?’*

“The disciples seemed irritated by this and said, ‘You see the multitude thronging you, and you say ‘Who touched me?’” But Jesus saw it as an opportunity to minister to a suffering woman. Her illness had made her ceremonially unclean and unable to participate in community life for 12 years!

“While Jesus was talking to this woman, Jarius’ daughter died. It was too late --- or so it seemed. But the delay allowed Jarius to experience an even deeper knowledge of Jesus and his power --- even power over death!”

When Jesus finally arrived at Jarius’ house, he encountered many people wailing and crying. This was customary with the Jews at that time in history and was designed to stress their desolation over the death.

The loud wailing was also done so that everyone within earshot would know that someone had died. The mourners would hang over the body and beg for response from the dead person’s lips and they would tear their clothes and their hair. As William Barclay said, *“The triumphant victorious hope of the Christian faith was totally absent.”* The mourners also needed the second expert opinion of Christ.

The article which I quoted from Our Daily Bread concluded, *“Sometimes our disappointment can be God’s appointment.”* I hasten to add that we all have a future appointment with the giver of the second expert opinion, Jesus the Christ.

The two stories in our scripture reading are stories about the presence of Jesus and his power. As I discussed in last week's message, Jesus is always present with us amid the storms of life.

Our scripture reading this week shows us that Jesus can do something about those storms. That something is his promise of salvation.

Alleluia. Amen.

1. William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, rev. ed., Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1975
2. Our Daily Bread, May 19, 2014