

Fed by Grace | Food in the Gospels

Give Her Something to Eat

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Mark 5.21-43

*When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. ²² One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet ²³ and implored Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live." ²⁴ And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. ²⁵ A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, ²⁶ 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-- ²⁷ after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. ²⁸ For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well." ²⁹ Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. ³⁰ Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" ³¹ And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" ³² And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. ³³ 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. ³⁴ And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction." ³⁵ While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" ³⁶ But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe." ³⁷ And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. ³⁹ And entering in, He said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep." ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). ⁴² Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. ⁴³ And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat. **Mark 5.21-43***

This current series is a look at the life of Jesus Christ in the FOUR GOSPELS using the theme of FOOD. This sermon though... may be just a bit of a stretch; just one sort of passing reference to food in the final words but it IS a fitting contrast to the next sermon in the series.

Today we meet a few of the minor characters in the Gospel According to Mark. Scholars have identified 13 minor characters called “suppliants” i.e. people who come to Jesus Christ with a need and who act (as one scholar describes) act as a foil to the disciples. In other words, where the Twelve are supposed to be believing Jesus Christ but are often NOT believing, these suppliants float in and out of the story and show the disciple AND THE READERS what it looks like to actually believe.

And one of the aspects of real faith or belief that these suppliants or requesters ALL demonstrate, one aspect of faith they ALL have in common...and it’s a quality that NONE of us ever wants...is desperation.

Today as we see these two intertwined tales of desperation we’ll also see (hopefully) that some of our situations and issues and most uncomfortable and nagging problems/pains MAY be the very things about us that are MOST spiritually helpful.

Let’s consider 1) The environment where faith is born 2) What these three scenes tell us about Jesus Christ and 3) How to convert CRISES into Spiritual Growth and Progress

Many people have at least heard of the list that came together in the medieval world, called the “Seven Deadly Sins” and one of those sins is slothfulness or what we think of as laziness. In the early monastic period of the church (The Desert Fathers) the idea was called “acedia” (a-c-e-d-i-a) and it was a little different from laziness.

The idea was closer to boredom or the refusal to enter in to God’s joy and thereby to lose a sense or wonder or energy or urgency about one’s daily calling and routine. The Desert Fathers referred to it as the “Noonday Demon” because this feeling of lethargy would set in right in the middle of the day and it would leave the unprepared monk in a state of distraction...and eventually discontent...and doubt.

One of the things that link together all the seekers, the suppliants is a kind of focus that is definitely NOT acedia or distraction. They’re desperate and dissatisfied and they come to a place in the short time we get to know them , they come to a place where they’re convinced that ONLY ONE PERSON can help them – complete single-mindedness.

In this three-part episode, we meet one suppliant and then there’s an interruption from a second (who has something to teach the first man) and then we return to the first.

There are a number of important comparisons and contrasts in these two super-focused seekers and as we retell their story we’ll see that the way Jesus Christ responds to them both tells us a lot about Him and gives us a Way out of this deadly, life depleting sin of

acedia or spiritual distraction.

The man is a “somebody” – his name is well-known; he’s a leader in his local synagogue, probably in Capernaum. He could be a very important ally for Jesus and the disciples (and I always picture the Twelve reminding Jesus of this very fact, “Lord, be careful with this guy – we need his kind in our organization!”).

His request is of the most urgent possible kind; his only daughter is dying and he has nowhere else to turn. Despite what anyone might think, this upstanding leader in the community, he throws himself at the feet of this controversial rabbi. Time is of the essence. Soon it will be too late but the IMMENSE CROWDS are blocking the way and though Jesus has agreed to come, the people are not making way...He’s trying to facilitate...trying to gently push through...saying, “excuse me...I’m sorry, sir, would you mind! Sir! Please...Jesus, right this way...please hurry...” And maybe, he’s pulling the rabbi just a bit.

And then, the rabbi stops and says, “Someone touched me!” And the disciples say, “Lord, are you kidding me! You're in a sea of people! Everyone is touching you!”

He says, “No...someone connected with Me. It was as if a circuit was completed, as if energy, dynamic went out of me.”

And there behind Him a cowering woman. She too risks everything. She has been unclean due to chronic bleeding for twelve years. She turned to religion, to technology, to science. She did whatever they told her, whatever humiliating, painful pseudo-remedies they gave her. (Ancient scrolls mention carrying around the ashes of an ostrich egg.) She paid. She paid with all her money and she was depleted and her funds exhausted. She had a reputation. She was isolated and lonely...she was a pariah. But now she was focused.

She pressed through the crowd. Everyone she touched was rendered ceremonial unclean but that didn’t matter. She had a plan to make contact; just to touch the tassels at the bottom of his cloak... and she did. And Jesus Christ turns, angry, to scold her for stealing a cure...or so she fears...but, in fact, He commends her. This unnamed, unclean woman is a model, an example of faith. She was desperate and she had only ONE target.

Maybe, Jesus is looking at the wavering, doubting disciples in their “acedia”... they’ve gotten used to these miracles...they’ve lost their focus, their hunger and desperation. He commends her as if to say to THEM, “See! This is faith! Daughter! Your faith has made you well!” Daughter...is what He calls her.

And just then...news arrives from the house... “the daughter is dead. It’s too late. Don’t

trouble the rabbi anymore... the funeral home is been called and the paid mourners have started to arrive. Too late.”

And Jesus Christ turns to the man and says, these simple and direct words (is it a command or a creative fiat?), “Do not fear...only believe.” (The most frequently found command in the Bible, “do not fear”...connected to the only time that Sola Fide is ever found in the Bible, “ONLY BELIEVE”)

And desperate enough to believe...what other choice does he have...where else can he go? The synagogue leader pressed on and Jesus Christ take the three “nick-named” disciples (3.16-17) and gives them a foreshadow of his own resurrection. “She’s only sleeping as far as I’m concerned”. And the paid mourners go from weeping and wailing to laughing in a split second. They ridicule the radical rabbi.

He kicks out all the gawkers, all the frivolous, casual people who know nothing of despair and nothing of faith...And with His three witnesses and the two parents, he approaches the girl. It’s too late...but He promised...

Simply taking her by her little 12-year-old hand, He says, in her native tongue “Little girl, get up.” And she does. She begins to walk. The parents and the three fishermen are open-mouthed astounded. Jesus gives strict orders, “Tell no one!” and last He says, “Something should be given her to eat.”

Now, what does all this say about this rabbi, about Jesus Christ? What do these actions reveal?

First, He has power. This is the last in a series of power displays. He has authority over sickness and He heals disease. He is the arbiter of what’s clean and unclean – has authority over the unclean spirits of insanity. He renders this ceremonially unclean woman whole and clean again - returns her to worship and to normal social interaction. He calmed the winds and the waves and shows that He has power over all creation and NOW HE HAS SHOWN THAT EVEN DEATH must obey Him and even TIME is subject to Him... “It’s too late” doesn’t hinder Him.

He is the Last Adam. He is come to reclaim all Creation and be its rightful King. He’s amazing attractive, a humble King so secure in His authority that He is completely unimpressed by Big Names and big titles and big money... Jairus (the influential) is only as important as this unclean, unnamed pariah whom He calls, “Daughter”.

And yet, He’s not a tame lion. When He works miracles, people are afraid and astounded, “Who is this man that even the winds and waves obey Him?” (4.41)

Secondly, He sees the human condition. He sees our despair and He enters into it. He doesn't stand aloof. He will enter in ...all the way...He will know a degree of desperation that no one has ever known. He will be despised and forsaken of men. He will be charged with MY crimes and all the sins of God's people will be laid on Him...and condemned under the full force of Hell... He will absorb our uncleanness and He will taste death for us. He will take the fangs out of our despair...will make despair a redemptive device in the lives of all His people.

He knows the deepest despair... and He is NOT afraid of YOURS...not afraid to accompany you...to enter in.

Third, He gives Himself to faith. God has nothing to say to the frivolous man...and faith can not be born or even nurtured in superficiality and shallowness. It is born and it thrives in an environment of desperation. That's what the flimsy disciples were learning from the suppliants.

He needs nothing from us. And yet He demands only one thing, OUR WEIGHT/HEAVINESS...our full self must rest completely ON HIM. "Only believe!" Put yourself fully in My nail-scarred hands as if NO ONE ELSE can help you... because... at last, our despair will reveal that NO ONE CAN HELP US...but Him alone.

Finally we should note, He has all power (the Final Adam); He enters our despair; He gives Himself to faith and demands that we TRUST HIM COMPLETELY and last, He is very down to earth and even practical.

He says, "Don't tell anyone" – Why? Well, among other reasons, He wants to get out of there. The crowds and gawkers are already make it impossible for his disciples to even walk anywhere.

And He speaks in the little girl's language (which was likely His native language too). He says, "Talitha, Kumi". R.T. France says it means literally, "Lamb, get up"... but that's what they called children. It's odd, that a society would call children by the name of a baby animal, isn't it? A child is a baby sheep – strange... But wait...we call children by the name of baby goats...we call them, "kids".

Do you see what this means? When Jesus Christ performed this miracle, He said, "Get up, Kid!" That's for real. That's how really earthy and real He is.

And ...because He didn't want anyone to think she was a ghost...and because you must

really work up an appetite when you die and are raised...SO, HE SAYS, "She should be given something to eat..." AND because I can see that YOU look hungry I should imitate Him.

I'll end on this: what might you do, to get free from our normal, acedia, that kind of frivolous lethargy that numbs us to God's joy and energy and wonder and ... leaves us dependent on many things and full of fret rather than "ONLY BELIEVE"?

Here are a few things to think about:

Do you ever wonder what happened to that unclean, unnamed woman (did she get healed, whole, fat and happy, lethargic and the last condition worse than the first?) or that little girl? ...'truth is we don't know what happened to any of the suppliants. They may have gotten what they wanted and that was it...the end of faith...I hope not...I THINK not.

But the point is – it doesn't happen automatically: our CRISES don't automatically convert into Spiritual Growth and Progress. We have to believe everyday like they believed in that moment of desperation. We come daily to see our inadequacy. To see that we are His workmanship and called to greatness TODAY but HE is the ONLY ONE who has what we need... this day...everyday...I must be desperate for His beauty and power...His holiness for my sin, His strength for my weakness...His approval for my new identity... I must come desperate everyday ...repenting and believing...new grace is needed for each new day.

Beware (Neil Postman) AMUSING OURSELVES TO DEATH ...texting...emails...tv...noise things that erode wonder and chip away at our spiritual attention span. It's not that we avoid all entertainment or become escapists...but instead what Eugene Peterson "spiritual reading" ...or viewing or listening...sharing joy. Even in moments when we read or watch or listen, we can AND MUST make it a communion with God.

Beware the NOONDAY DEMON and combat him by grace and in prayer... use the Psalms as we saw last summer...get with OTHERS...a HomeGroup ...live in community and relationship...share your struggles with others who also struggle.

Finally, know this there are more ways than one to touch Jesus Christ. Make sure you're not just one of the crowd, rubbing up against Him. He doesn't give Himself to gawkers and the curious who are looking for a little life-enhancement while they pursue their own agendas. He wants real connection with those who really believe...and if you despair of all your options and really touch Him, really connect...if YOU ONLY BELIEVE and keep believing... ONLY THEN...will you really become all that God has made you to be.