

COURAGE TO HEAL

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Mark 5:21-43

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Almost 250 years ago, a group of colonial rebels gathered in Philadelphia and declared American independence from British rule. It was a dangerous decision, and a war followed soon after – a bloody war, a revolutionary war, a fight for independence which cost many lives and created a rift between the British Empire and the newly formed United States that lasted for more than a century. But somewhere along the line, the rift began healing, and we became friends, to the point that many would consider the England to be our closest foreign ally. How did that happen? How did two nations, having begun in enmity go from being enemies for more than a century to becoming friends and allies? How did such amazing healing occur? The healing didn't happen easily or naturally. It took a lot of courage, as all healing does. And the first courageous step we took toward healing was to ask each other for help. Asking for help began the healing process between two countries seemingly destined to be enemies, and in the helping one another, we became tentative friends, slowly learning to trust one another, asking for help late in the 19th century, and developing even stronger bonds through the 20th century.

This is how healing happens – by reaching out for the help we need and then slowly trusting that healing is possible - healing of body, mind, soul, and even relationships. Both of the healing experiences in today's scripture reading occur because someone asks for help. Asking for help isn't easy. It must have been terribly embarrassing for a synagogue leader to fall at Jesus' feet, begging this controversial young man to come and heal his daughter. And yet, ask he did. But Jairus didn't just ask for help, he begged humbly, passionately, and publicly in front of a great crowd—a crowd who probably looked at him as their strong, confident, spiritual leader –

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more accustomed to arguing with Jesus than leaning on him. Even so, Jairus bravely reached out for the healing he and his family needed. And Jesus reached back, changed his travel plans and went with Jairus to go and heal Jairus' daughter.

Then, Jesus' journey to heal Jairus' daughter is interrupted by another courageous seeker of healing. Desperate to stop the pain and the bleeding, this woman reaches out to touch Jesus' garment in hopes of healing. She knows the rules forbid what she is doing, not only because she is a woman, but because she is bleeding, a double taboo for touching any man because she is considered ritually unclean. But she reaches out for help anyway. She didn't ask permission to get the help she needed; rather, she reached for it - boldly, passionately, and vulnerably, despite the risk of being cast out for such a bold breaking of the rules. And rather than cast her out, Jesus reaches back, with his own sort of courage – stops everything he's doing to reach back and find out who had reached out for him for healing. Knowing that he should not be touching a woman, let alone an unclean woman who has been bleeding for years, Jesus talks with her anyway - publicly blessing her and proclaiming that her faith has made her well.

So many stories of courage. But courage to seek the healing we need can change our lives and even change our world. The courage of both Jairus and this unnamed woman brought more than just physical healing, but also spiritual healing and even relational healing. “Your faith has made you well – shalom,” Jesus proclaims. Shalom – so much more than just a healed body, but a healed spirit, a reconciled relationship with God and God's people. Healing takes courage, whether it's healing of the body, healing of the spirit, or healing of a relationship – but the reward for our courage is life-changing. A woman who had been cast out and condemned, who had known only misery and distrust with doctors and priests and neighbors who did more harm

than good, is now given the wholeness she needs to re-build not just her body, but her life, and even her life within the community that had rejected and condemned her. Jairus, who thought his child was dead, is given a new perspective, a means to hope in something so much more than just his power or his scriptural knowledge or his own ability, but now to trust in God in a whole new way, allowing him to build a very different type of relationship with God and his community. These two courageous people who sought healing, just like our courageous sister-country across the ocean and our own courageous country, can inspire our own courage to seek the healing we need, to reach out for help and healing that our loved ones need, to rebuild relationships so that our families and communities can be strong enough to endure the challenges of this life.

There is hope for the healing we need, and the healing our broken world needs. A woman bleeding to death for years can find new life. A religious leader more accustomed to telling others what to do finds new hope in asking for guidance and help. Two countries, seemingly destined to be enemies forever, discover new strength in forgiving past wounds and humbly asking for help. No matter what ills we are enduring, what struggles we face, what broken relationships we suffer, and what healing we need, Jesus is reaching back to offer new hope and life-giving healing whenever we're ready for the miraculous help God can offer.

But it starts when we have the courage – or even the humility – to reach out for the help and healing we need. None of us can solve all of our problems on our own. We were not created for isolation; we were created for relationship. We are not meant to see ourselves as disconnected, but rather to understand that we are all connected to God and to one another. Yes, it takes courage to break down the barriers that divide us and keep us from asking for the healing and help we need. But it's worth every courageous step. Jairus broke through the barriers of

embarrassment and status and responsibility to seek the healing his daughter needed. He asked for help, begged for it even. The unnamed woman broke through those same barriers of embarrassment and status and fear to crawl her way to Jesus. She reached out for the help she desperately needed, even if it meant further humiliation or possibly even rejection. Just like American and England during the Spanish-American War and later World Wars I and II, realizing we needed one another if we were going to make our countries and our world safe for our citizens and earth's peoples.

It's risky to ask for help. We might be rejected. It's risky to express our needs. We might be embarrassed. It's risky to seek healing. We might not get well. It's risky to reach out and ask for forgiveness, or to reach out and offer forgiveness. It might or might not go the way we hope. On the other hand, we might discover that help is all around and healing is within our very reach: from people who love and care for us, even from people who hardly know us. We might discover that our needs can connect us deeply and intimately with others—others who see our wounds and our weaknesses. Only in such seeing can others reach back to help, strengthen, and comfort us.

And in doing so, we might discover that an old enemy becomes the friend we need the most, an illness that has haunted us for years finally has no more power to destroy our lives, and a despair that we thought would never end is transformed into hope for better days ahead. When healing comes in any of these ways, we truly can celebrate freedom, freedom to heal and freedom to live in the joyous hope and the loving shalom God yearns to offer to each and everyone us, and to each and every corner of God's good earth.