

*Jesus Restores the Broken to Life*

Mark 5:21-43

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Time for a survey...and I'm taking this survey because I want to find out if you're the kind of folks who've got your act all together. Okay, ready? How many of you get regular check-ups from the doctor? And the dentist? How many of you can hook up your own Internet service at home and don't need help from your children or grandchildren? And how many of you have no trouble getting everything done on your to-do list?

I've got news for you: this week's gospel reading is perfect for the people out there who don't have their act all together. Now, I know what you're thinking: that means all of us, right? Well, sure, except we're not always ready to admit it, are we? I mean, what happens to us when things fall apart for a while? Researcher Brene Brown writes that one of the hardest things for us to do is be vulnerable, to come across like we don't have it all together.

As you well know, we've been drenched by rain over the past couple months in many parts of Minnesota and the Upper Midwest. Some of the crops didn't get planted, and of those that did, large portions are underwater. My heart goes out to those of you who are farmers, and to your families. You're bound to feel helpless at a time like this.

Speaking of helpless, the Blue Earth River has been rushing toward the Rapidan Dam outside of Mankato. It's made the national news. We've watched as the churning water washed away more and more of the land holding up the little white house on the bank of the river. And then one day, the house tumbled into the river, and suddenly it was gone. This past week, the Rapidan Dam Store, a mile away, had to be emptied out and torn down. For the Hruska family, long-time owners of that house and store, it was bound to be a helpless feeling, just as it's been for the farmers.

We've been following several stories of flooding throughout the area. Kirstyn Wegner's parents, Clay and Sharon Miller, live in Waterville. As the flood waters rose, they moved the food and dishes higher and higher in their cupboards. Then the water and the power went out, and the refrigerator was floating. They needed to leave.

Oh, they've been able to get back a few times to check on things, but they have to take backroads to get there, and then wade through 2-3 feet of floodwater. Despite the mess, Clay and Sharon are profoundly grateful for the hundreds of volunteers who came to fill sandbags in an effort to save their town. And they're also grateful for another daughter, Pami, who has room for them to stay in nearby Faribault.

There's a common theme in these flood stories: a feeling of helplessness and desperation. In this regard, they're not so different from the folks who reach out to Jesus in our gospel for today. Each has a story to tell, each is desperate, and they clearly don't have it all together.

Jairus is a leader of the synagogue. He comes to Jesus asking for help. Not all Jewish leaders were open to Jesus, but evidently Jairus was. Leaders are trained to be competent, to get things done, to have it all together. That fits...until your twelve-year-old girl gets sick, really sick, maybe even to the point of death.

We can understand why Jairus himself *runs* to Jesus, instead of sending someone. We can understand why he *throws* himself at Jesus' feet, rather than look him in the eye. And we can understand why he does not ask politely, but rather *begs* for Jesus to come home with him. Jairus is desperate. His love for his daughter has left him utterly helpless and vulnerable.

Brenda and I have a daughter named Ingrid. Ingrid had her first grand mal seizure about the age of Jairus' daughter. We didn't see it coming. It scared us half to death. Later, the doctors had a name for it: juvenile onset epilepsy. But whatever it's called, it's scary when our kids get sick. Like Jairus, Brenda and I were willing to do just about anything to protect her and get her well.

The unnamed woman in our gospel is pretty much the exact opposite of Jairus. She has no social standing. There's no one to go the teacher on her behalf. And if that's not enough, she's been bleeding for twelve years. Mark doesn't emphasize the bleeding. But according to Jewish law, it would have rendered her "unclean" and thus cut off from her community. Equally troubling, it probably would have kept her from having children, someone to look after her in her infirmity. The woman quietly sneaks throughs the crowd, seeking merely to touch the cloak of this healer that everyone's been talking about. She's desperate. She's hoping against hope for an end to her illness, whatever it takes to get well.

Lots of people have been coming to Jesus. He's swamped. Each in their own way is desperate. Each is helpless and vulnerable. One thing seems abundantly clear: they've given up any need to have it all together, or at least to pretend as much. No, they come to Jesus exactly as they are—broken, and desperately in need of healing and hope.

So, what do we do with stories like these? I have a couple of ideas. First, we can try to change the way we think about vulnerability. Again, Brene Brown is helpful. When things go wrong, she says, we often end up feeling exposed and desperate. If such is the case for us, Brown nudges us toward open and honest vulnerability, much like those stories in Mark.

Only by admitting our vulnerability, says Brown, are we able to find the courage we need to act differently. Who knows, maybe admitting our need won't be the end of the world, just the end of the world we've so carefully constructed. If we're able to leave behind that carefully-constructed world—and *this is important*—we may be able to accept ourselves and others as simply *good enough*. We may enter a new world of acceptance and mutual regard that is profoundly different than so much of the world around us. Jesus has a name for this world. It's called *the kingdom of God*. And at the heart of it is God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

A second thing we can try: to work at being a community where people don't need to have it all together. This can be hard, perhaps especially in a small-town church like Good Shepherd where so many people know so much about you—or at least think they do.

Lots of churches say: "Everyone is welcome. Come just as you are." But I'm not convinced they mean it. Sometimes those churches are referring to shorts and blue jeans, instead of suits, ties, and dresses.

But what if we take it a step further? What if we pledge to be a community that genuinely accepts people with all sorts of differences, a community that works to restore the broken to life, a community that accepts limitations and honors vulnerability and feelings of helplessness? How different would that feel? How welcoming and supportive could we become? I mean, how many people are desperate for a word of acceptance and love from us, for a word that says, "You are good enough, just the way you are!"

Friends, what do people need from us? Probably a whole lot of acceptance and love. Our hard-working quilters recently sent a number of quilts to Lutheran World Relief. They soon received a warm thank you from the president of the organization. He acknowledged the care that goes into making these comforting gifts of love.

Then the president told the story of a woman in Ukraine who received one such quilt last winter. Her name is Natalia Chernenka. She's an elderly woman. She said that the comfort of the quilt meant so much to her, especially because her house had been damaged by a missile, and it was so very cold on so many nights. It's an incredibly touching letter. You can read it in the July version of *The Voice*.

Friends, today's gospel is about healings, but it's about more than that. It's a lifeline for those who are sometimes helpless, who don't have it all together. That would be folks like our rain-soaked famers, the Hruskas at the Rapidan Dam, and Clay and Sharon Miller in Waterville; folks like Jairus, the bleeding woman, and Jairus' daughter; folks like Natalia Chernenka; and folks like you and me.

To be honest, I don't expect Jesus, as caring as he is, to stop every storm, to heal every disease, and to raise the dead like he did for Jairus' daughter. But I do believe this: when we go to Jesus with our desperation and helplessness, he will not leave us exactly as he finds us. Broken people will be cared for and restored to life. And that is good news indeed! Amen.