

I'd like you to think with me for a moment about the number 12. We have 12 months in a year. We have 12 jurors in a jury trial. We have a special name for the number 12, a dozen.

Maybe you remember the Movie *12 Years a Slave*.

12 years is a long time. Or is it?

12 years ago it was 2012. . . which doesn't seem that long ago, right? Sort of feels like last week.

But twelve years from now, it will be 2036,

which sounds so futuristic that it seems like

we'll be living in Jetsons-type space pods and driving flying cars!

As you know, 12 is an important number in the Bible, in the OT we see

- 12 sons of Jacob, who become
- the 12 tribes of Israel.
- 12 cakes were placed in the Tabernacle.
- 12 spies scouted the Promised Land.

In the NT of course there are

- 12 disciples,
- 12 baskets of bread leftover from the feeding of the 5000
- And The Tree of Life in Revelation will bear 12 fruits.

In all these, the number 12 symbolizes God's power perfection or authority—often used in a context of government, as well as a completeness.

The number 12 plays a significant role in our gospel story from Mark this morning, but before we dig deeper into understanding the number 12, however,

there is something you should know about the structure of our two stories.

In this text, Mark employs a literary technique to call attention to his point. This passage is a classic example of a literary device that Mark characteristically employs, scholars call it “intercalation,” but it's more readily understood as a “Markan Sandwich.”

Mark likes to “sandwich” one story in between another story,
to highlight his point.

E.g. in our gospel today,

The beginning of the story of Jairus’s daughter is one “bun” so to speak,
The woman with a hemorrhage is the meat, or pb&j,
And the ending of the story of Jairus’s daughter is the other bun.

So, in this Markan Sandwich, the number 12 appears twice,

–the number of wholeness and completeness–

However, contrary to expectations, the two sets of 12 years represent
anything but wholeness and completeness.

The hemorrhaging **woman** had been suffering for twelve years.

12 years of spending “all her money” consulting doctors,
12 years of her condition getting worse.

(. . . *spending lots of money consulting lots of doctors,*
if only we could relate...!)

For Jairus’s **daughter**, 12 years also represents the age at which girls come of
age in Judaism, and so it appears that Mark mentions the girl’s age to
emphasize the tragedy of her dying before she could marry,

And in a patriarchal society,

before her father could marry her off,

receive a dowry, and expect grandchildren to continue his

lineage.

At age 12, when she is just ready to step into adulthood,
she is deathly ill.

On the surface of it, the two protagonists seem to be quite different,

As one preacher¹ pointed out that

Jairus is of substantial standing; the woman is of no account.

Jairus rushes forward; the woman sneaks up from behind.

Jairus is looking for a miracle; the woman is looking for magic.

Jairus is prominent, the woman is poor.

Jairus is advocating for his daughter, the woman is on her own.

Jairus is an insider, the woman is an outsider.

¹ Rev. Roger Nelson

Jairus has a name [and power], the woman is anonymous [and powerless].

Jairus and the woman are seeming opposites,
from two different ends of the social strata:
upper crust, and bottom of the barrel.

But . . . for all their differences,
they are both in need,
And they both believe in Jesus

In face of illness and horrible physical suffering, there is faith:
The faith of a father, who believes Jesus can heal his daughter
The faith of a woman, who believes Jesus can heal her

And doesn't this tell us that God is an *inclusive* God?

God is not interested in
wealth,
power,
cultural patriarchy or social order -
God cares about binding up the broken.

Jairus professes his faith outwardly and the woman silently
- yet both receive healing.

Jairus is an "important" person,
yet Jesus takes the time to be with woman as well.

Last week we saw Jesus crossing a boundary, from the East/Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee to the West/Non-Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee. While Jesus was there, he famously cast the demons out of the Gerasene Demoniac into the pigs who promptly plunged into the sea.

Back across that geographical boundary to the eastern, Jewish side of the lake, we see Jesus crossing, and breaking, other boundaries,
namely cultural and religious boundaries.

Jesus certainly breaks a boundary *when the woman touches him* and he responds with healing and compassion.

She was unclean, no Rabbi should come near her.

In a culture where religious laws defined community, she was an outsider. Her condition pushed her to the fringes. She couldn't participate in the monthly

purification rites required of all Jewish women. She couldn't marry, couldn't join others in work or worship, and couldn't live in the community. She was marginalized, ostracized, isolated, alienated, and cast out.

Rosemary Radford Reuther points out that:

Jewish law regarded a woman with a flow of blood as unclean and polluting anyone else she touched. Jesus' reaction to the woman shows his *deliberate discarding of the taboo*, while the woman's own terror at being discovered in touching his garment reveals her awareness at violating the taboo.

She was suffering physically, socially, and financially. So maybe that's why, when Mark describes the woman suffering from hemorrhages as having endured much, he uses the word *paschō*,

which is the same word Jesus uses when he talks about the suffering that the Son of Man will endure.

In the gospel of Mark, *paschō* is only used to describe *this woman and Jesus*.

While Jesus tarries to heal the woman with the flow of blood,

Word comes that Jairus's daughter has died.

Yet Jesus presses on. "Only believe," he tells Jairus.

With Peter, James, and John in tow, he arrives at Jairus's house and says, matter of factly to the mourners,

"She's asleep"

And they LOL. Literally. They laugh out loud at Jesus!

"What kind of deluded person is this guy?"

And Jesus breaks a boundary with Jairus's daughter since corpses were also unclean and should not be touched. Yet here is Jesus, taking her by her lifeless hand, and speaking words of resurrection to her, "rise up,"

Egeire, in Greek,

the very same word that will be used

About *Jesus being raised up* from the dead.

And the laughing people stop laughing, and can't believe their eyes.

And to be sure that somehow she wasn't just a ghost,

they gave her something to eat, which she gobbled down.

So is it too much to see these two stories

as precursors to Good Friday and Easter Sunday?

The suffering of the women,

Foreshadowing the suffering of Jesus on Good Friday,
the dead little girl being raised foreshadowing Easter
Resurrection?

Mark, it turns out, is some storyteller!

Commentator Emerson Powery makes an observation and asks an excellent question of us:²

“Jesus chooses not to leave people in the conditions in which he finds them. And he has the power to alter that condition. Do we? Can the Christian community alter the conditions of people's lives? Can it, too, bring healing into ³troubled circumstances? Must it not also cross boundaries -- whether they are related to ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, politics or any other boundaries that divide our society -- and advocate life-giving meaning and change? May God grant us the courage to do so!”

How can we encourage people to profess their faith and live it out both verbally and silently?

How do we respond when we are approached and touched by the “unclean”? Do we see it as an invitation into relationship or as a theft of our personal space?

How do we discern who are the unclean in our community?

Who are the ones who are too embarrassed, too wounded, or too afraid to ask for healing? How are we welcoming them?

* * *

And as we all have loved ones who are suffering, like Jairus,
And we all have our own sufferings like the unnamed woman.

May we know the healing touch of Jesus
Who out of suffering and death
Brings healing and resurrection.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/> July 1, 2012.

³ *Feasting on the Word – Year B*, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16)