

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Mark 5: 21-43: Some Notes

See also Matthew 9: 18-26 and Luke 8: 40-56. Note that in Matthew, Jairus's daughter is already dead, and that only Mark criticises the doctors. This sandwich story technique used by Mark is very effective, and the whole passage is very powerful. Clearly, there is common ground between the stories – perhaps more than at first appears. The woman has had menstrual problems for twelve years – twelve years of ritual unclean-ness and social isolation. The girl is twelve – legally, at that time, just becoming a woman, and perhaps physically becoming a woman. One commentator has suggested that the little girl could have taken to her bed because she couldn't face the prospect of womanhood and marriage.

The synagogue leader goes out on a limb, and a very public limb, to get help from his daughter from this heretical preacher. It has been suggested that the combination of him leaving his daughter's bedside to go himself to Jesus, plus the promptness of his household to tell him not to bother because it is now too late, indicates that even his nearest and dearest didn't want him to risk his reputation and position by going to Jesus.

The woman who touched one of the four tassels on Jesus' outer robe was making him unclean too – another problem for Jairus, who had come to invite Jesus into his house. The Talmud specified eleven ways of tackling the woman's problem – a number of them so weird that they underline how tricky the problem was to resolve in those days. Three things stand out in this part of the story: the woman's desperation; the fact that healing "cost" Jesus: it wasn't easy come/easy go; and the fact that the disciples had no idea about the cost of healing. The disciples were only aware of the jostling crowd, and couldn't see what Jesus was getting at. *Why did Jesus insist on making the "hidden" healing public?*

Our mourning conventions are so very different, that it is worth touching on just how elaborate the Jewish mourning rituals were: including professional wailers, flute players, torn clothes. (Women tore their clothes in private, and the torn undergarment was reversed to make sure this tear didn't match up with the tear in the outer garment.) You can see why Jesus had some difficulty in cutting across all this in your face grieving with his "She isn't dead!"

I love the sensitivity of the relative privacy of the healing/raising. (Mark doesn't specifically confirm that the girl was dead.) Above all, I love the "Get up, kid" (literal translation); and the "Give her some food". The food bit doesn't confirm, but would be consistent with the theory that the girl was fighting her own body and destiny. *Why, writing for an audience more likely to understand Greek or Latin than Aramaic, does Mark use here the Aramaic "Talitha cum"?* We have very few Jesus Quotes in Aramaic. Those who remembered and chose to record these few quotes must have had their reasons.

As always with healing/raising, we need to address the reality that most women with bleeding problems at the time of Jesus carried on with those problems; and most children

who died stayed dead. Despite huge advances in medicine, women still have problems and children still die. (Not so long since this year's Butterfly Service at Croydon University Hospital.) As Christians, we can't just assert that Jesus = Healing. You can picture one of the would-be mourners saying to Jairus: "My little girl wasn't so lucky." Jesus knew that of course..... Knows it.