

Does Anybody Want a Sandwich?

Mark 5:21 – 43, Psalm 24

The First United Presbyterian Church of Crafton Heights

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To hear this sermon as preached in worship, please visit

https://castyournet.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/scene1_2018-04-22_11-28-31_t001_in1.mp3

What is your all-time favorite sandwich?



Years ago I was having lunch with a group of pastors down at LaVerne's Diner in the West End – a place that, sadly, is no more. It was one of the shiny-on-the-outside, Art Deco on the inside places that featured lots of formica, good coffee, and simple food. As LaVerne herself came to take the orders, she asked what I wanted. I said, “LaVerne, it all looks good. You decide. Give me your best sandwich.”

She said, “Well, what do you like? How do I know how to make it?”

I said, “There's no ingredient on this menu I won't love. You make me the one you like best.”

So she went back to the kitchen and pushed the cook, John, out of the way. Every now and then she would yell to me through the window separating the counter from the kitchen: “Will you eat onions?...What about cheese?...” and so on. Each time, I simply responded, “LaVerne, make your best sandwich.”

She came out with our four plates and put them down in front of us. I picked up mine, which was essentially a glorified cheeseburger, and took a bite. “Mmmm,” I said, “Outstanding! This is delicious! What do you call it?”

And LaVerne got a little red in the face and looked down and said, “Well, it’s the ‘Big L’.” Because of the look on her face, and the way that she treated me every time I went into the restaurant after that, the “Big L” was my favorite sandwich.



What’s the point of a sandwich, anyway? It’s a simple dish wherein bread serves as a container or wrapper for some different kind of food. Of course, having the bread makes the delivery of the other food a bit easier (can you imagine ordering a grilled cheese and then saying “hold the bread”?). But the best sandwiches rely on an interplay between the bread and the filling. You can’t have, for instance, a Monte Cristo sandwich unless you use French toast. Can you make a gyro if you use a croissant instead of a pita? Of course not...it’s just a lamb sandwich. The bread and the filling go together to make the whole package – which is often more than the sum of its parts.

Our scripture reading for this morning is a peculiar bit of storytelling that the theologians call “a Markan sandwich”. At least eight or ten times in his Gospel, Mark will start off by telling us one story, and then just when that one gets going, he’ll switch his theme. When he’s finished interrupting himself, he’ll get back to the original thought. Now, you know as well as I do from personal experience that when someone does this in conversation, it can be frustrating and difficult to follow. However, when Mark does it, it almost always provides us, as hearers of the gospel, with a chance to look at how the stories connect with each other. In fact, often times the “bread” of the story will serve as a commentary on the “meat”, and vice-versa.



So today, we have a typical Markan sandwich for our worship meal. The

outer layer is a story about a wealthy, powerful man named Jairus, and his sick daughter. The filling is a story about a poor woman who was herself sick, and who in fact had nobody besides Jesus to whom she could turn.

Do you remember where we were when we last saw Jesus in the gospel of Mark? He had taken us over to the region of the Gerasenes, where we had to spend the night in the graveyard with a demon-possessed madman, surrounded by pigs and pig-farmers. You may recall that we thought that the disciples were not all that happy to be there, so you can imagine their relief when, upon coming home to “our” side of the lake, they are met by Jairus.

What a contrast between the wealthy, respected, learned, distinguished leader of the community and the total loser with whom we had to spend the night among the tombs. I’m sure that the disciples followed this conversation between Jairus and Jesus with great enthusiasm: “OK, Now we’re getting somewhere!” They have to be thinking that this conversation with Jairus is an indication that Jesus is wising up and that things are going to get better for him, his ministry, and for them.



¹But no sooner had they started off towards Jairus’ home when Jesus stops the procession. In the crush of the crowd, someone has brushed up against him. Jesus stops, and demands to know who it was.

Do you think that the first disciples of Jesus ever snapped – if they ever looked at Jesus and said, “What are you, nuts? Give me a break!” Well, that appears to be what happens in this morning’s reading. “Come on, Jesus,

¹ *The Woman With the Issue of Blood*, James Tissot (c. 1890).

there have to be 200 people around you. How can you even ask a question like that?”



It was more than simply an issue of Jesus feeling as if his personal space was invaded. Virtually every adult Jewish male in that day would have worn a prayer shawl while walking around – and surely a Rabbi such as Jesus would have had his on. The edges of these shawls were woven in such a way that they ended in four tassels, called tzitzit. The prophet Malachi, writing about four hundred years earlier, said that the “sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings”. The faithful Jews of Jesus’ day had come to believe that was a prophecy about the coming Messiah – that he would be so Godly that even if one were to touch his “wings” – his tzitzit, that one would receive healing. When this woman reaches out and receives healing in this way, Jesus allows her to confess her faith that he is, in fact, the messiah.

Meanwhile, Jairus has to be thinking, “Look, I’m not opposed to healing or theological conversation, but the fact of the matter is that we’re in a race against time here...” And in fact, while Jesus is still speaking to this un-named woman, they get word that they are too late. The girl has died.

Yet as you have heard, that’s not the end of the story. Jesus takes Jairus and his family home and raises the little girl, much to the amazement of the mourners who had gathered.

So there you have it – the sandwich. Mark could have told us about the healing of Jairus’ daughter, and then said, “and the cool thing was, there was this other healing while Jesus was on the way...” But he doesn’t. He wraps them together, and in so doing, he invites us to compare them. So

let's do that now – let's take a look at the different healings that comprise this “sandwich”.

Jairus' Daughter	Woman who was bleeding
Powerful, wealthy family with many resources	Unknown, unconnected, unnamed woman who had “spent all she had”
A public appeal to healing based on status	A secret approach made in fear
12 years of joy-filled living with a beloved daughter	12 years of isolation and shame – living as one “unclean” and unwelcome
She was a precious child	She was nobody's child (she is never named or acknowledged until Jesus himself calls her “daughter” in v 34)
A public approach results in a private healing	A private approach results in a public healing
Jesus risks being labeled as “unclean” by contacting a dead body	Jesus is rendered “unclean” by being touched by a woman who is bleeding

Note that in both cases Jesus – just as he did with the Gerasene – risks “crossing to the other side” to be with folks.

When LaVerne made me that “Big L”, she took special care to combine the meat and the condiments and the bread. I learned something about her in the choices she made, and in the way that she made that sandwich and served it to me.

When Mark uses a “sandwich” to tell us about a Jesus who heals both Jairus’ daughter and this sick woman, he tells us something about that Jesus. What can we learn from this passage?

I don’t know about you, but sometimes I need to remember that not every interruption is a negative thing. I get my day all planned out and think that I have all my ducks in a row...and then something else happens. If I’m paying attention to Jesus, I can learn that sometimes some incredibly important things can happen when I least expect them. What would happen if I were to treat each “interruption” in my day as an opportunity to learn more about God’s purposes for the world or for myself?

Planning is a good thing, and I’d encourage you to do it. But I’d warn you to not get so lost in your plans that you miss the chance to see God at work in the unexpected each day.

But more than a lesson about scheduling and planning and interruptions, this is a story that speaks to me about hope. There is hope for everyone, Mark says. Even if you feel as if you have suffered for a lifetime – did you notice that the woman’s illness had lasted as long as the little girl’s life? – there is the possibility that God will make his presence known to you, or through you, in amazing ways.

And this hope is available to everyone – even to “outsiders”. The woman who had been bleeding suffered from more than a flow of blood. The cultural law mandated that for the health of the community, she had to refrain from contact with any other human being as long as she bled. She was in a hell of loneliness and isolation – she was outside of any group you could think of. Yet this is the one that Jesus calls “daughter”. He blesses her. In naming her healing publicly, he restores her to her life and to her community.

There is hope for those of us who feel as though we are on the outside looking in.

When we are feeling “on the top of our game”, it’s easy to suffer through a tough time. But when we feel unworthy or unclean, it’s a little easier to feel that anything bad that is happening to us is simply judgment – I’m just getting “what I deserve”. This sandwich reminds me that there is hope for healing and joy in everyone’s life – not only those who are pure, but for those who are struggling and for those who feel like we’ll never be good enough.

And lastly, as Jesus confronts the evil of death in this passage, we learn that it’s never too late for hope. The little girl’s parents must have felt a little foolish when Jesus went in and took the hand of their daughter and spoke to her corpse...yet Jesus restored her to them.

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Is there a part of your life where you have given up hope? Is there something in you that you feel is too far gone? Let me encourage you not to laugh at Jesus with the other mourners, but rather to allow him and his disciples to enter into the deepest and most painful part of your grief...to enter into the place that you think might even be dead...and to allow him to speak to that.

The sandwich that Mark fixes us this morning reminds us of the truth of the Psalm: “The earth and *everything on it* belong to the Lord; the world and *all of its people* belong to him.” If the healing and hope of Jesus does not include both the unnamed woman and the rich man’s daughter as well as both the disturbed man who roamed amongst the tombs and the eager disciples who gave their lives to the Lord, then it’s not really hope at all. It’s a reward for people who are in the right group at the right time in the right place. Yet this is a bold claim that in fact, the promises of Christ are open to all,

and the presence of Christ is universal. My prayer is that this will nourish you and sustain you and encourage you to move forward in your journey of faith with the one who is the “sun of righteousness, risen with healing in his wings.” Amen.