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*the One with all the questions:
What's Wrong?
Mark 5: 21-43*

There is nothing more frightening to a good parent than to receive the news that their child is seriously or mysteriously ill. And there's nothing we wouldn't do to make our kids well. Right? My assistant Kathy's son is fighting an auto-immune disorder. He regularly receives a shot of a very expensive drug. Every visit to receive the shot takes 2 ½ hours... and every single shot costs \$7000. And he's had 20 of them! But it doesn't matter. We would do anything, pay anything, endure anything to save our children, wouldn't we? So, we can completely relate to this man, Jairus. We met him last week, but let's go back once more to set this in context. (v. 21-34)

Jairus was the president of the local synagogue. A person of dignity and bearing, he was highly respected and very influential. People came to him for advice, for favors. But now, the tables were turned. While Jesus stood there in that crowd, Jairus rushed up to him in a very undignified manner. And then he did something that the members of his community had never seen before. He threw himself on the ground, tears streaming down his face. This was an odd display for any man... but for the synagogue president? It was unheard of. Unseemly, frankly. They expected better of him.

But Jairus was desperate. His 12 year old daughter was deathly ill. He had tapped every resource that his wealth and influence provided, and nothing had worked. It must not have been easy for this member of the religious establishment to ask for help from a wandering rabbi from Nazareth. But Jairus was willing to try anything. If this man could help his daughter, he didn't care what town he came from or what other people thought about it. So he came. He fell at Jesus feet. He begged. And, to his enormous, relief, Jesus said, "Yes." And off they went. And everything would have been okay, were it not for that awful woman. What was she doing there, anyway? It wasn't proper! She was unclean and everyone she touched was defiled. Even worse... she touched the rabbi's clothing. Now He was unclean, too. And because Jesus was now unclean, he shouldn't be allowed into anyone's house until he had purified himself. And especially not the house of the synagogue president.

Maybe those were the first thoughts Jairus' had as Jesus stopped to find out who had touched him. But more desperate thoughts followed, because now that unclean woman had thrown herself at Jesus' feet, blocking his way. "Wait a

second," Jairus thought. "I was there first! I have dibs on him!" But no... she collapses before Jesus and begins to talk. And talk. And talk. She tells him her whole story... 12 years worth. That's how long she had been sick.

Well... that same 12 years ago, his daughter had been born. And now she was dying. This was more important. Even if Jesus was willing to socialize with the misfits, surely he could do it later! This woman had been sick for 12 years! She could be sick for one more day... one more hour. It wasn't going to make any difference with her. But one more minute might make all the difference for his daughter.

If you were Jairus, how would you feel? Can you see him? Standing nearby. Rocking back and forth anxiously. Gripping and re-gripping his fists? Tapping his foot. Inside his head he was screaming: Stop it! Stop talking! Shut up! Jesus...you've got to come now. Right now. My daughter is dying. Please, I'm begging you! Come now!"

But Jesus would not come. He listened to that woman's whole story. Tim Keller writes that if Jesus were a doctor, he could have been sued for malpractice. To neglect a life and death situation for a treatment that could have been delayed was irresponsible. But Jesus would not be rushed. And he would be interrupted. He finished his work with this outcast woman... and made the hotshot religious leader stand and wait.

But finally He was done. Finally, Jairus thought, that wretched woman said all that she had to say. Finally they could move on to the most important matter: his sick girl.

(Read v. 35-43.)

During Advent, one of our candle-lighting families was the Davidsons. Nikki is pregnant with twin girls. One of them, Savannah, is doing fine. But Ellie is having troubles. They have decided Stanford offers the best care for their condition so the Davidsons made plans to leave for Stanford tomorrow. But last Monday, the doctor called and said, "I want you down here now." What do you think they did? Everything they needed to, of course, to get down to Stanford earlier than planned. Because they love Ellie. Because every moment counts. (And, by the way, things are stable right now. Keep praying!)

Jairus loved his little girl. He knew every moment counted. But by the time he had dislodged Jesus from the clutches of that woman, it was too late. Servants came with the horrible news. His baby was dead. No reason to bother the rabbi any further. No point. It was too late.

But it wasn't too late. It never is too late for Jesus. "Don't be afraid; just believe." I wonder if these words even registered in Jairus' shocked mind. But

Jesus started toward the house and Jairus followed. When they arrived, Jesus went inside and discovered the grieving crowd. And he asked this question: "Why all this commotion and wailing?"

Do you realize how stupid Jesus' questions sometimes seem to onlookers? "What is your name," he asks a wild-eyed, naked, bleeding crazy man who is sprinting toward him. Really-that's the question you want to ask that guy? "What is your name?" "Who touched me?" he shouts to a crowd that surrounds him, all of them pressing, reaching, touching him. "Really?" his disciples ask him. You want to know who touched you?" "Why are you crying?" What's wrong with you?" He asks a house full of family and friends who are mourning the death of a teenage girl. "Really, Jesus? Really... you can't figure out what's wrong? You don't understand why these people are crying? Really, you don't know heartsick grief when you see it?"

Then Jesus offers the lamest reason for why they shouldn't cry: "She's not dead; she's just sleeping." Well... maybe he was right? Maybe Jesus noticed shallow breathing. Maybe he found a weak pulse. Maybe Jesus saw that she really was just sleeping. Wrong! Why am I so sure? Because Jesus had not even seen the girl yet! Look at the next verse. "After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was."

To the mourning crowd, the girl was dead. But what is death to the Lord of Life? He knew what he was going to do...even if it wasn't on their timeline. The Lord of Life walked into the bedroom, took the dead girl's hand and spoke: "Talitha, koum!" "Little girl... get up!" And that dead twelve year old came back to life... and Jesus told them to make her a sandwich. Dying makes you hungry! In this sermon series, Jesus is teaching us to ask transformative questions. The first three questions we have learned are like peeling off the skin of an onion. "What is your name? Tell me about yourself." That's not very threatening, is it? The next question: "How are you...really?" That's a little deeper. "Tell me what is going on in your life. Good or bad. I'm curious; I'd like to know!" Sometimes the answer to that question is, "I'm doing great! Life is good!" Wonderful...then celebrate together.

But now comes the third question. It is deeper. And this one takes more courage to ask. "I notice a lot of commotion in your life. You seem to be sad. Your eyes are puffy. You are not yourself. What's wrong!" We don't ask that question unless we sense that things aren't right. Maybe after we ask, "How are you...really," they respond, "Well...life sucks right now!" Then what's your next question? "What's wrong?"

And this is the question that requires courage. This is the question that is a little scarier. Because if they actually tell us what's wrong—if they actually tell us why

they are crying—we might not know what to say. We might not be able to fix it. It might even make us want to cry, too. And who wants to do that?

Someone told me this week that a person they knew casually asked them how they were doing. They decided to tell them the truth: their life was a mess right then. So they started to tell them how they really were... and the person stood there for a moment with that deer-in-the-headlights look, and then just turned around and walked away! They were terrified!

So I'm warning you, this is a tougher question. Having the courage to notice that something isn't quite right—having the courage to say the words, "What's wrong... tell me."—is digging in one layer deeper and it might be frightening. You may not know how to respond. You may not have the answers. May not be able to fix it. So then, why ask the question? Why peel off the scab? Why risk the embarrassment and the pain?

Because the "what's wrong" question reveals perspective. The reason that Jesus could ask those mourners what seemed a stupid question is that he had a perspective they did not have. He knew he was going to raise that girl from the dead. He had already decided to do it. If they had known that he was going to raise her to life, they wouldn't have been crying. They would have been waiting... eager to see it happen. But they did not believe in Jesus; they did not see with eyes of faith and they did not have a heavenly perspective. So they laughed at Jesus.

One of the reasons we ask friends, "What's wrong," is because we are compassionate. When we see someone who's life is in commotion; whose cheeks are streaked with tears... we ask "What's wrong?" because it is the human thing to do. Even if we don't have answers. Even if we can't fix it. We share their pain and burden. That takes guts.

But the deeper reason we ask that question is this: it offers the chance to see tragedy and pain from a heavenly perspective. If we believe that life is capricious—if we believe that fortune or tragedy is just a roll of the dice, if we believe that failure and sickness and death have the last word—then of course we will wail when things go bad. It is hopeless! But if we believe God is sovereign, that all things are under His control, even tragic things, then it changes the answer to the question. Then our answer becomes, "What's wrong is... I don't yet see how God is going to work this out. But I believe he will and I am just waiting for the touch of Jesus."

Next week I will bury my friend Jim. He died last Sunday during my second sermon when I was talking about him. In my final meeting with Jim, he described the last three years of his life with cancer as "a gift." He said, "I don't want people to think I was angry about my cancer. I didn't get the short end of the stick. I got the best end of the stick. I had the privilege of doing my bucket list.

With my friends and family gathered around me, the best three years of my life were spent dying of cancer. And now, I cannot wait to see if heaven is like I imagined it to be."

Those are the words of someone who sees life—and death—through the eyes of faith.

When we come to the communion table, we ask the question, "What's wrong?" And Jesus replies, "What's wrong is that you are broken. What is wrong is that your life seems hopeless. Death appears to have the last word. But I have come to kill death. I have come to make what is wrong, right. This meal reminds you of that. So trust me!"

(Sacrament of Communion)

If after this service you saw a crying child in the hall, you would stop and ask the question, wouldn't you? "What's wrong?" Only a monster would walk by. Well this week, you are going to see a child of God whose life is in commotion; whose eyes are puffy; whose countenance is dark. Two simple words, "What's wrong?" will provide the compassion they need. But they also might provide the perspective they need. What's wrong? Will you have the courage? If you trust me, I will take care of you. This meal is a reminder that

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. What was your most frightening experience with your child or a child that was dear to you? In light of that, reflect upon Jairus' state of mind in this story.
2. The three questions so far are, "Who are you...really," "How are you...really," and "What's wrong?" How does each dig deeper? How is the last one threatening?
3. Pastor Mark said that it's always the same thing that is wrong: we don't have the perspective of Jesus. What does he mean by that?