

Mark 4:21-43
June 27, 2021

Markan Stories

When you take a close look at the way Mark constructs his gospel, there are certain interesting features that become evident more so than in the other gospels. Let me mention a few, just for the sake of being informed, “fyi” as we say.

First, there is an urgency in Mark’s gospel that is diminished a little in others. Jesus is always doing powerful deeds and moving from one incident to the next rapid-fire, next, next, next. Matthew and Luke especially remove a key word that has the affect of slowing the pace. Or the other way around, Mark tells the story in a hurry.

There is also the way Mark likes to make a sandwich of some of the stories. He begins one story, then tells another, and then goes back and finishes the first. Often story-tellers go in a linear fashion, telling one incident, then another. This “sandwich” strategy has the affect of highlighting the story in the middle, and emphasizing the common features of both.

Finally, more than in the other gospels, Jesus in Mark is presented as performing powerful deeds, that we call miracles, then telling them to be quiet about it, not to tell anyone. Some call it “The Messianic Secret.” Of course, very often, after he tells them not to tell, they tell everyone, and the news about him spreads quickly.

Like the stories we read last week; David and Goliath and the Calming of the storm, the story of Jairus’ daughter and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood are somewhat familiar. While Jesus is en route to the house where the young girl is sick, he is delayed by a woman who in the hustle and bustle of the crowd touches him, “just the edge of his garment,” because she believes that if she does, she will be healed.

He stopped to see who it was and it turns out to be a woman who has been sick as long as the young girl has been alive. In the delay, the young girl dies. Messengers come to tell the girl’s father that Jesus will no longer be needed and not to bother him any longer.

But Jesus will have none of it. In spite of the mourners and the behavior of the crowd, Jesus took the girl by the hand and raised her up. There seems to be a happy ending all around. All three of these features are represented here in Mark’s telling of the two miracles.

As always, it was temporary. The way time passes, it wasn’t long before both the woman and the girl succumbed, their lives came to its natural end. Since these kinds of miracles do not happen everyday, we must ponder their meaning. What is the eternal significance of these temporary extensions of life?

What is going on in these stories is mortality, not just in the sense that people die, but that they suffer, and in the long run, every one of us succumbs.

Life has both troubling and beautiful qualities. Getting sick is one of the troubles, and so is dying. Just to be alive is an astonishing miracle.

One can not escape the conclusion that since sooner or later everyone suffers and dies, these miracles that Jesus did do little else than delay the inevitable. What Jesus is really trying to do is remind all of us what a grand miracle life is, even if our lives are otherwise humdrum, or so we think, filled up with the ordinary.

Because of the faith that each of us has been born to a purpose, the assumption is that these two women were not finished with their time on earth, but my suspicion is that we will not be long satisfied with that answer, we search for a heightened meaning of the miracles themselves.

Every day that one does not die, one's life is also extended, to the living out of one's purpose. The "miracles" are but intense experiences of the miracle of life itself. It is as easy to have one's life extended by not getting sick at all as to get sick and then be healed. What is left is the display of God's life-giving power. Perhaps it is that display, which is no more prominently displayed than on the cross, is where Mark is in such a hurry to get.

Let me draw attention to the way people are always amazed, as if they have never seen anything like it. Most people have seen one or two amazing things that are hard to explain. "Miracles" are common

enough, but they are also rare enough that when they do happen, they are astonishing.

Not surprisingly, we are told that her parents were astonished. how could they have failed to be amazed? How could we fail to be entranced by the wonder and joy of it? And yet in a way we do fail. When "miraculous" things happen, they do catch our attention, but in "ordinary life" we can be driven to the point, by the absence of what we think is astonishing, where we easily miss the astonishing miracle of being alive.

Every breath we take is a grand miracle; every birth, every new beginning, every full moon and starry sky, new sunrise, every smile from a stranger, meal, paycheck, handshake even, they are all miracles because they did not have to happen and did happen and the energy that drives them is as profoundly mysterious and amazing as the energy that stopped the bleeding and raised the young girl. "Is not life more than what you think it is?"

Life happens in a hurry, but we get interrupted along the way, sometimes, by the extraordinary things that accompany us on the journey. Sometimes we are silent because we did not notice, sometimes because we have been left speechless. Other times we burst forth.

Let us burst forth in gratitude, and humility, in goodness and kindness, in peace and hope.

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