

ELCA Malaria Campaign

Bible Study: Leader's Guide

Mark 5: Jairus's Daughter
By Rev. Joene Herr
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Mark 5:21-24, 35-43

21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. ²²Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³and begged him repeatedly, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.' ²⁴So he went with him....

35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?' ³⁶But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.' ³⁷He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.' ⁴⁰And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Prayer (Psalm 40:1-3): I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.

Introduction:

When I decided to write a Bible study to use in conjunction with the ELCA Malaria Campaign, I considered the various well-known texts about feeding the poor and justice, texts that are frequently used for issues of poverty and hunger. Malaria is a disease of poverty; have no doubt.

Yet, this seldom-studied story from Mark 5 spoke to me. The story is in all three Synoptic Gospels and in two of the three years of our Revised Common Lectionary. Yet, most commentary, sermon aids and Bible studies are about the story *within* the story of Jairus's daughter; our story bookends the well-known narrative of the hemorrhaging woman, which is usually the focus of preaching or study within Mark 5.

Perhaps it is because this gospel story of healing is often overlooked. Perhaps it is because the story is about an unnamed girl on her deathbed, who reminds me of the hundreds of thousands of boys and girls who contract malaria each year. Boys and girls who are loved by their families; boys and girls who are nameless to us but precious to their loved ones and precious in the eyes of God. Perhaps the Holy Spirit called me to study this word of God for some reason yet to be discovered. I pray that as you hear or read this study, the Holy Spirit awakens within you a desire to respond to the cries of mothers and fathers, especially in Africa, to reach out and touch their sons and daughters with healing through the ELCA Malaria Campaign.



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God's work. Our hands.

Part 1: The Brink of Death

Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.

As with many of the men and women who reach out to Jesus for help, we know very little about Jairus. He lives near the Sea of Galilee; just prior to this story, Jesus had been on the other side of the lake, among the Gentiles, casting out demons. Jairus is a member of a community and he is a leader in their synagogue. We know little else- about his age, wife, other children- we only know he has a daughter ill to the point of death.

It would seem that parents should have to think about burying their children. Generations are meant to follow each other. We hope that parents have children they want and love, we hope that parents have dreams for their sons and daughters; dreams that envision a life long after the parent has left this earth. God placed us on the earth to create generations ("And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it." Genesis 9:7). Living to see your children bear children is a blessing (Genesis 50:22-23).

Jairus is facing the unthinkable; he has a daughter ill to the point of dying. We don't know how long this girl has been ill; we don't know what other attempts Jairus has made to find healing for her. We don't know how Jairus came to hear about Jesus. We only know that Jairus had reached the point of desperation, the point of repeatedly begging Jesus for help.

Imagine hundreds of thousands of parents like Jairus in Africa and in other places around the world where malaria still infects and kills. Parents who watch their children lie in bed—often on a mat on the floor—as the children shiver from fever, vomit, and ache from muscle spasms.

Almost 3,000 children die each day from malaria. Each day...that's one child every 45 seconds. Children under five and pregnant women are most at risk.

The disease begins with a simple mosquito bite one night.

A mosquito lands on a young girl's arm. It plunges its proboscis into her skin and begins feeding off of her blood. The saliva it squirts into her arm carries the malaria parasite into her body. The parasite silently rides the girl's bloodstream to the liver, and begins to multiply in her cells.

Two weeks later the symptoms begin. The parasites have multiplied in her liver 40,000 times. She feels fatigued and has a headache. The malaria parasites burst from her liver cells and into her bloodstream. She is overcome by chills, and her parents start to worry. They've seen the symptoms of malaria before, and they know what happened to other children with these symptoms. The girl vomits and her body is racked by muscle spasms. The malaria parasites have destroyed so many of the girl's red blood cells that even breathing requires extreme effort.

The girl needs medical help immediately. If she doesn't receive correct treatment in time, she could slip into a coma and suffer irreparable brain damage. It's possible that within 12 hours of the first sign of symptoms, she may be dead.¹

¹ www.malarianomore.org/get_involved/tools "Malaria Primer"



Part 2: Your Daughter is Dead

²⁴*So he went with him. While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?'*

Why trouble the teacher any further? The witnesses to this story did not know of the magnitude of God's power. They did not know of the depth of God's love for humankind. A love so deep, so strong that God sent God's only Son, Jesus to live among us, to teach us, to heal us, to bring us life abundant. The witnesses to this story only saw one man, Jesus. They may have heard of his healings, but this was different. Jairus's daughter was dead. Beyond help.

The facts:

- Bill Gates has called malaria "the worst thing on the planet."
- The World Health Organization has named it "public health enemy #1."
- 40 percent of the world's population — more than 2.6 billion people — is at risk of contracting the disease.
- Almost one million people die every year from malaria, 90 percent of them in Africa. That's more than twice the death toll of a generation ago.
- Malaria costs Africa \$12 billion dollars in lost productivity each year. It is one of the biggest reasons so much of Africa remains in desperate poverty: malaria-endemic countries grow 1.3 percent slower than non-malaria endemic ones.²

It is easy to become discouraged in the face of such reality. The number of people contracting the disease and the number of deaths are discouraging facts. It is easy to turn away, to say there is nothing we can do, to grow numb. Malaria is a reality. This is the way it is. Like death is a reality.

Part 3: We Need to Believe

Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.'

Do not fear, only believe. So simple, yet so difficult especially in the face of reality. For Jairus the reality was a dead daughter. For us, the reality is all the problems in the world, all the diseases, including malaria. Yet, Jesus tells us to believe; to have faith even in that which we cannot see. To have faith that God can and will use us to bring healing to little girls lying on their death-beds.

Did you know that malaria was once a feared disease in America? Around the turn of the 20st century, the United States government took steps to eradicate the disease. Still, in 1933, 30 percent of the population in the Tennessee Valley region was affected by the disease. The Public Health Service (and the Center for Disease Control) played a vital role in research and control, and by 1947 malaria was essentially eliminated in the United States.³

Today, we have the tools we need to eliminate malaria around the world. We have knowledge of the disease and how it is transmitted. We have the technology. We know that using mosquito nets significantly reduces the transmission of malaria. We know that water management—eliminating stagnant water—removes mosquito breeding grounds. We even have medicines to treat malaria once it is transmitted.

What we need is the will, the desire to act. We need to believe. We need to trust in God's power to heal. God's power to heal not only sick children half way around the world, but to heal our indifference, our selfishness. We need to trust God's power to heal our feelings of hopelessness.

² www.malarianomore.org/get_involved/tools "Malaria Primer"

³ www.cdc.gov/malaria/about/history/



Part 4: Accompaniment

³⁷*He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.*

Jesus invited his closest disciples to follow him. Perhaps he was preparing them, teaching them how to bring life in the midst of death, teaching them to heal. Later in Mark, we hear Jesus instruct his disciples as he sends out the twelve to cast out demons and cure the sick, under Jesus' authority.

As the body of Christ, we, the church, are under the authority of God and called to follow Jesus as well. As Jesus instructed his disciples to heal, so we, the body of Christ, are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring healing. Through the ELCA Malaria Campaign, all of the members of the ELCA can work together to join Jesus' healing make a healthier future possible for those impacted by malaria.

Just as Jesus invited others to accompany him, the ELCA Malaria Campaign is working with our companion churches in Africa. Because of the relationships we already have in place, we can be assured of the positive impact of our efforts. Pastors at Lutheran congregations in Africa are teaching about malaria. In villages, clinics are being created and nurses are hired and trained to treat those infected with malaria.

Part 5: Choices

³⁸*When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.* ³⁹*When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.'* ⁴⁰*And they laughed at him.*

God has promised a time when "he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4). We wait, living in the in-between time of Jesus' first coming and the promise of no more mourning and crying and death.

As we wait, we have choices. We can laugh cynically at efforts to heal the sick, or feed the hungry, we can mock efforts to bring justice to the world. Cynics existed in the time of Jesus and they are alive and well in the 21st century. Some of us have lost faith in many of our institutions- we have lost faith in government and even in the church. We can wonder if what we do can make an impact. Even our acts of giving seem so small in the face of such complex problems and suffering. After all, what can a gift of \$10 do?

Part 6: Little Girl, Get Up!

Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹*He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!'* ⁴²*And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.*

A simple touch, a call to "get up" was enough to rescue this child. Her father had begged Jesus to make her well. The Greek word *sozo* means more than just to make well or to heal, it also means to restore. This girl— un-named to us but greatly loved by her family— was restored to life, restored to her family through a simple touch, an act of compassion. God used a simple touch to heal, to restore to life.

Sometimes a simple act seems—well, too simple. Might Jesus have done something more dramatic, more theatrical, more impressive? The world likes a show of power; we desire "shock and awe." Yet, the dramatic displays of power we desire are most often not God's ways. God used the foolishness of the



cross, surrender to suffering and death in order to overcome it. God acted and continues to act through the simplest of acts. Like a touch.

Through a simple gift of \$10, you can provide a family a mosquito net, instructions to use it and follow-up visits to make sure the net is being used properly. A simple mosquito net used at night will keep away the female Anopheles mosquito, who feeds on unsuspecting victims in the night while they sleep. A simple mosquito net can prevent the deathly touch of the mosquito. Or a simple gift of \$2 provides the medicine to treat malaria once it is contracted; medicine that can prevent death.

Part 7: It Is Our Time

⁴³*He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

We don't know why Jesus ordered them not to tell. Perhaps because it wasn't time; here Jesus was in the early stages of his Galilean ministry. But now it is our time to tell. Our time as evangelical people, people claimed and called by God to share the good news. It is our time to tell and our time to tell through our actions of faith.

This story of a beloved daughter's restoration to full life we see now as a foreshadowing of the resurrection of Jesus—the resurrection promised to us all. As we await Jesus' coming again, we as believers are called to witness, to heal and feed as the body of Christ. Healed and forgiven by God's grace, we are called to action that reveals to the world the in-breaking of the reign of God.

We are called to actions like the ELCA Malaria Campaign. Children and parents will be healed, will be restored to life, will be able to care for their families and communities, will be able to raise food, work and will be able to move out of poverty. We will be reminded again of the power of simple acts of faith.



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Bible Study: Handout

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Prayer: Psalm 40

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.

Part 1: The Brink of Death. In my congregation, our weekly prayers almost always include a child; an infant born too soon or with heart problems, a child diagnosed with cancer; how about at your congregation? We sometimes mourn the death of a child. Have you ever buried a child or do you know someone who has?

Part 2: Your Daughter is Dead. What malaria facts surprised you? Do you know anyone who has contracted malaria? What can you share about their story?

Part 3: We Need to Believe. Recall and share about a time you were surprised by God's power- God's ability to bring healing. How have you shared that story with others?

Part 4: Accompaniment. Share about a time you partnered with someone to solve a problem. What were the different gifts or talents you each brought to the problem? Could you have solved the problem without help?

Part 5: Choices. Some Christians seem focused on looking for signs of Jesus coming again, or signs of the Rapture. How are we as Lutherans called to live in this time of waiting for Jesus to come again?

Part 6: Little Girl, Get Up! Sometimes solutions get so complicated. What do you do around your home that is a 'simple solution?' Hang laundry to dry outside? Share your 'simple solutions'.

Part 7: It is Our Time. How can your group or congregation help 'tell' the ELCA Malaria Campaign story and be part of the effort to end malaria?



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