

## **The Power of Hope**

Psalm 130; Mark 5:21-43

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This is from the journal, *Psychology Today*. It is an article titled, "The Power of Hope," written by a medical doctor named Dale Archer.

*If I could find a way to package and dispense hope, I would have a pill more powerful than any antidepressant on the market. Hope is often the only thing between man and the abyss. As long as a patient, individual or victim has hope, they can recover from anything and everything.*

Anything and everything? That is a strong statement. You might expect me to say that as a man of faith. But this is a man of science, a medical doctor, saying it. He continues.

*However if they lose hope, unless you can help them get it back, all is lost. One thing I can tell you is that hope is an emotion that springs from the heart, not the brain. Hope lays dormant until it's amazing strength is beckoned, supplying a sheer belief that you will overcome, you will persevere and you will endure anything and everything that comes your way. (Psychology Today, July 31, 2013)*

Dr. Archer may be a man of science, but what he is describing here is the power of religious faith. Hope is an emotion (I'm not sure that is the right word.), he says, that springs not from the brain but from the heart. As a medical doctor, he is not talking about the muscle that pulses within our chest. No, he's talking about that place within the human experience where our deepest and most powerful resources reside. The heart is the place (though it is not a place at all) from which hope, faith, and love issue. The heart is seat of religious faith, and he is right. The things that issue from there are more powerful than any pill on the market.

We see two examples of the power of hope in our text from Mark's gospel. I find this to be a fascinating text. It starts with a little girl. We will learn that she is twelve years old and is the daughter of a man named Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue. In this story, Jairus pushes his way through a crowd of people to get to Jesus. He throws himself at Jesus' feet and begs him, "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." One translation (Cranfield) reads this way, "My little daughter is 'at death's door.'" So Jesus leaves with Jairus to tend to the seriously ill little girl.

But he's interrupted. The tension in this text is palpable. We want Jesus to hurry and help this little girl. He's like an ER doctor who's frantically trying to get to every patient, but he continues to get interrupted.

The crowd "pressed in on him," Mark says. One in the crowd is pressing, reaching, straining more than all the others. She is a woman, Mark tells us, who has been ill for twelve years. She has had a hemorrhage for these twelve years. She has spent all her money with various doctors but has grown only worse. Mark says that this woman also fights her way up behind Jesus and touches his cloak, thinking, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

The woman is never named in the text, but tradition has named her Bernice. My New Testament professor from years ago, Alan Culpepper, says that the verb tense here suggests that she said this over and over. I can see her pushing through the crowd, reaching for Jesus, saying, "If I can just touch his clothes, I will be made well. If I can just touch his clothes...."

She does. She touches his cloak, and immediately she is healed.

The tension increases even more now because Jesus stops. Remember he is on his way to a little girl who is at death's door. Jesus stops. He asks, "Who touched my clothes?" The disciples are incredulous. Just look at all these people, they say. It could have been anyone.

But it wasn't just anyone. It was one woman. Not named. She was desperate. She believed. After twelve years and exhausting her resources, she still hoped.

This unnamed woman falls at Jesus' feet and confesses everything. Here's what Jesus says to her, "Daughter...." Not, "woman." She is a stranger to Jesus, so he doesn't know her name. "Daughter," he says, "your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

As we celebrate the healing of this woman who has been ill for twelve years, a messenger arrives telling Jesus that there's no more need to hurry. The little girl, at the tender age of twelve, has died.

Jesus ignores the messenger and says these five important words to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe."

Hope.

When they get to Jairus' house, the mourners are weeping and wailing loudly. These may have been professional mourners. They were sometimes employed to make sure sufficient mourning took place. Maybe they were family and friends. Jesus tries to stop their mourning by telling them that the little girl is only sleeping. Here's why I think they may have been professional mourners. When Jesus says that she is sleeping, they turn off the mourning and start laughing at Jesus.

Jesus puts all the mourners out of the house, takes Jairus and his wife, and they go into the room where the girl is. Jesus takes her by the hand and says in Aramaic, the language he would speak, "'Talitha cum,' which means, 'Little girl, get up!'"

Here's what Mark says happens, "And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about." The people are amazed.

A little girl and a woman. One was twelve years old and gravely ill. The other had been chronically ill for twelve years and had exhausted her resources. The girl's father was so desperate for a cure that he fell at the feet of Jesus and begged. The woman was so desperate

that she “stole” her healing by slipping up behind Jesus and touching his clothes. Both were driven by the power of hope.

Dr. Archer, the psychiatrist who wrote the article in *Psychology Today*, works with victims of hurricanes. He says that he has found that there are two types of survivors. He calls them psychological victims and psychological survivors. The victims are passive, pessimistic and look to the past. They ask, “Who will help me?” He says that they despair, are consumed by their loss, and refuse to help themselves.

The psychological survivors, on the other hand, are active, optimistic, and look to the future. They ask, “How can I help myself?” They grieve, but they continue to persevere and fight.

He says that his job is to turn victims into survivors, and he says does it by instilling hope. He says that the three most important ingredients of hope are these: faith, gratitude, and love.

Do you know what that is? Those three words are the essence of Christian faith. Faith, gratitude, and love. Dr. Archer is right. That is more powerful than any pill on the market.

These stories are about the power of hope, belief in the goodness of God, belief in the goodness of God’s world, belief that issues from the heart, not the brain, belief that can help us endure anything and everything that comes our way. Here are the questions this text asks us: what robs you of life? What illnesses hold you back and steal your joy? Its invitation is to believe, to fall on our knees, to reach out to Jesus, to hear his invitation: “Do not fear, only believe.” That, I tell you, is the power of hope.

#### Closing Prayer

Lord, we believe, or we try to believe. We ask that you help us. Help us believe and find life again. Amen.