

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 5:21-43

Year B - Proper 8, Text: Mark 5:21-43
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The prior verses from Mark 5:1–20 speak of Jesus exorcizing a Gentile in the region of the Decapolis — to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

Verse 5:21 refers to Jesus returning to the west side of the Sea of Galilee — possibly to the region of Capernaum. After He arrives there, a great crowd gathers around Him on the seashore.

Verses 5:22–24: Jairus, a leader of a local Jewish synagogue, comes to Jesus, falls on his knees, and begs Him to come to his home as quickly as possible. His 12-year-old daughter is dying!

Jairus refers to his “little daughter,” and seeks a cure — not resuscitation from death. Although the daughter is not yet dead, she is at the brink of death — but there is still hope that she can be healed. Jesus accedes to Jairus’ request and sets out for his home.

Verses 5:25–34: At this point, there is a break in the Jairus narrative. The crowds that gather around Jesus along the way set the stage for a miracle within a miracle. By inserting the narrative of the hemorrhaging woman into that of Jairus’ daughter, Mark dramatizes a sense of tension and focuses on the miracle of the resurrection.

A woman creeps up to Jesus, and secretly (so she hopes) she touches His cloak. The woman has been suffering from a menstrual disorder for 12 years — a condition that makes her miserable in health and an unclean outcast among her family and community. Her hope is that if she can but touch Jesus’ cloak, she will be healed. She touches Jesus’ cloak — and is immediately healed!

Jesus, sensing (better, “knowing”) what has taken place, asks, “Who touched My garments?” Of course, Jesus knows who touched Him, but He forces the woman to “confess” that she is the one who touched Him. This she does fearfully, expecting Jesus (and others in the surrounding crowd) to rebuke her in no uncertain terms.

But Jesus does not rebuke her. He addresses her as “Daughter,” commends her for her faith, and bids her to go in peace! In relating to the woman in this manner, Jesus once again does away with concern for laws having to do with ritual purity (see Leviticus 15:25-30, but note also the surrounding contents of Leviticus 15:19–24 and 31–33).

Verses 5:35–43: After Jesus heals the woman with the menstrual disorder, He is told that Jairus’ daughter has died. Nonetheless, Jesus goes to Jairus’ house, taking with Him Peter, James, and John. After arriving at the house, He goes into the room where the dead girl lies — taking with Him the three disciples, Jairus, and his wife. He then takes the (ritually unclean!) dead girl by the hand and commands her to return to life.

Those who witness her restoration to life are amazed! Jesus then commands them not to tell others what He has done and asks them to give the girl some food.

It is intriguing to note that the woman had been hemorrhaging for twelve years, and that Jairus’ daughter was twelve years of age. (Is there a hint here of a reference to “the 12 tribes of Israel” being restored to wholeness?)

Jesus’ actions in Mark 5 become more profound and radical when we understand that, according to the Jewish religious elite, two of the worst things a person could do were to touch a dead body, or to touch a menstruating woman. Those who touched such people were required to undergo expensive and time-consuming rituals — only to resume normal life on the following day. However, other people do not infect Jesus with their uncleanness; He infects (“heals”) them with His divine wholeness!

