



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

March 20, 2016 (Palm Sunday)

"Up, Down, Higher" (Encounters with Jesus)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

Mark 5:21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea.

Mark 5:22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet

Mark 5:23 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."

Mark 5:24 So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.

Mark 5:25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.

Mark 5:26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.

Mark 5:27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,

Mark 5:28 for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

Mark 5:29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

Mark 5:30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said,

"Who touched my clothes?"

Mark 5:31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'"

Mark 5:32 He looked all around to see who had done it.

Mark 5:33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

Mark 5:34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Mark 5:35 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?"

Mark 5:36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."

Mark 5:37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.

Mark 5:38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

Mark 5:39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."

Mark 5:40 And 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.

Mark 5:41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!"

Mark 5:42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.

Mark 5:43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

This is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. Two stories are going on at the same time— like a parallel cutting back-and-forth, similar to what we see in movies. So imagine these two encounters with Jesus like you're watching them in a film.

In scene 1, we meet a man named Jairus. He is the big man on campus. He does not only go to the synagogue, he is also THE ruler of the town synagogue! He's the big cheese. Rich, influential, powerful. Jairus goes to Jesus and asks Him to heal his dying daughter. Jesus follows Jairus, and off they go to his house along with all of the disciples. A large crowd follows them because they heard Jesus is going to heal a dying girl. They want to witness that.

In scene 2, while Jesus is walking, a woman from the crowd comes up to Him. Nobody notices her at first because she's lost in the crowd.

She has been bleeding for 12 years. She heard about Jesus and how He could heal people. Imagine her fighting through the crowd. She thought that if she could just touch His clothes without Him noticing it, she would be healed. And so she reaches out and touches Him. Incredibly, immediately, and instantly her bleeding stops! Jesus turns around because He felt healing power go out from Him.

This is the first time in the book of Mark that the word “power” is used. In Greek, it is the word *dunamis*, the same word from which we get the English word “dynamite.” It’s that kind of power that Jesus felt came out from Him. Jesus asks, “Who touched my clothes?” This must’ve made the disciples laugh and think, “Really Jesus? You’re surrounded by people! They can’t help but bump into You, and You’re asking who touched Me? So many people have!”

But Jesus looks around. He knows someone touched Him with a different purpose. He felt some of His healing power—the *dunamis*—go out from Him. Now, this woman knows that she has been outed. She may have realized that if Jesus felt power leave Him, He would surely figure out soon who touched Him. So trembling with fear, she falls at His feet and tells Him her whole story, the whole truth about her illness.

Imagine now how our pretend movie camera cuts to Jairus. Imagine what’s going on in his mind: “You have got to be kidding! My daughter is about to die, and Jesus is choosing to stop and listen to this woman? We don’t have much time! Let’s go!”

Here we begin to see the kind of life we can expect from following Jesus. This is super important. It is UP, DOWN, HIGHER. Understanding UP, DOWN, HIGHER is helpful especially

when we face pain, challenges, and disappointment.

When Jairus found Jesus, Jairus was UP! He had hope. He believed that Jesus could heal his daughter and save her from dying. But when Jesus stops to talk to the bleeding woman, Jairus feels DOWN. All of a sudden his hope for his daughter plummets. I imagine a panicked despair, and probably even tremendous agitation and anger towards Jesus.

I can just imagine Jairus thinking to himself: “How can You talk to this woman at a time like this? Ever heard of triage? You know Hebrew and Aramaic, but you probably don’t know French, Jesus. Triage is determining the priority of patients’ treatments based on the URGENCY AND SEVERITY OF THEIR CONDITION.

“Jesus, you may not be the sharpest tool in the tool box, but you’re supposed to take care of the people with the GREATEST need. With my daughter dying, I believe she takes priority over this woman who has been bleeding for 12 years.

“This woman has had a CHRONIC problem. My little girl has an ACUTE problem. Triage means let’s go to my house right now. In English—Hurry up! In Spanish—Arriba, arriba! Andale, andale! In Japanese—Hayaku! Hayaku! Get up and go!”

For you today, and in any language, have you ever had an experience with God when you feel you’re telling Him to hurry up and answer your prayers? Have you ever prayed like this to God: “Where are you, God? Can you hear my prayers? Please hurry in answering them!”

God, don’t you know I’m sick? Don’t you know my loved ones are sick? Don’t you know I need money now? Don’t you know I need a job? Don’t you know I want a spouse? God, are You mute? I can’t hear you!

There’s a book called GOD ON MUTE written by Pete Greig, a friend of our church and one of the speakers at the recent HIM conference. Inspirational book. He wrote it when his wife had cancer. It was such a tough time that it felt like He couldn’t hear God and that God wasn’t hearing his prayers. Pete had to take care of their two young sons all by himself, plus take care of his wife who was too sick to help. But by God’s grace she was later healed.

Pete had an UP, DOWN, HIGHER experience: UP – because of his hope and faith in Christ, DOWN – because his wife got cancer; and then HIGHER because she got healed and he felt more grateful than ever.

But there are continual seasons of up, down, higher as you and I know. For Pete, after the cancer and the healing, they discovered his wife had epilepsy. Up, and then down. But she has it more under control now and together they have planted another church in England. HIGHER!

You all have heard me say before that if we follow Jesus, it becomes an upside-down world for us. We will soon discover that our priorities don’t seem to match Jesus’ priorities. What we think is important may not be important to Him at the moment. And what’s important to Him may not, at the time, look important to us.

Part of the difficulty is that we live in a secular world, and we can take its secular, worldly values instead of what Jesus values. Let me explain.

Going back to the triage illustration, we would say that in the secular world, the powerful and rich should get the best care and treatment. Jairus is rich. He is of high-esteem and has an influential position in society. Jairus probably wondered, “Why should this woman have priority over me? She’s nothing. She’s on the lower rung of society.

If she has been bleeding for 12 years, that means she's cursed in the eyes of society. She's unclean. And to make matters worse, she's a woman who dares to touch Jesus, a man! She's a sinner!"

But for Jesus this woman has priority. A cursed, sick, poor, allegedly immoral woman who touches a man in public gets priority in Jesus' eyes more than an accomplished, rich, and religious man. This is an upside world!

As Jenny preached last week, Jesus hangs out with the sinners, the irreligious, and the outcasts. He never gets mad at sinners. It's the religious He gets mad at because their religious practices make them appear holy and pure, but in their hearts they are proud and they look down on others who aren't like them.

There's a Jairus in all of us that asks, "Why is Jesus not getting it? He doesn't seem to answer my prayers at the time when I absolutely need those answers."

Friends, we need to leave our culture to understand the Jesus culture. If we can ever get out of our own culture, we will discover that the concept of time is a lot more relative.

When Pam and I used to put on conferences in the Bay Area, part of our plan was to have many African-Americans attend the conference. To help make that happen, I would visit with African-American leaders in the community in the cities of Oakland, East Palo Alto, Hayward, and San Francisco. Many of us come from a culture where a lunch meeting with a leader is strategized to get him or her to buy into our plan. We quickly get to the point, seal the deal, and get that person to say yes.

But it's different in the African-American culture. The initial meal with them is just a meal. They want to know if they can trust you, and that takes

time. None of this two-martini lunch and boom!, the contract is signed. They take their time. They get to know you. They build a friendship so that trust may develop.

It turned out in the end that many of the African-American pastors came to our conference, and 50 percent (!) of the 1000 attendees were African-American, 25% were Asian, 25% were white, and the rest were Hispanics. It's extremely rare in our country to have that cross-cultural mix in a conference because it takes time to build relationships and trust.

In other cultures – Asian, Middle Eastern and others you hear of the concept of "three cups of tea." What does that mean? It means when you meet people, it should be over a long time, over sipping three cups of tea with them. After one cup, you are a stranger. After two cups, you are a friend. After three cups, you're family. Only after then is the relationship forged, nurtured, and built. When you get into the culture of Jesus, we need to know He is on a different timeline. He will not be hurried. We have to get out of our American, microwave, and fast-paced culture.

Jairus wanted Jesus to hurry but Jesus would not be hurried. Tim Keller says it is NOT that Jesus says to us, "I will not be hurried, but don't worry I love you anyway." Rather, Jesus is saying, "I will not be hurried BECAUSE I love you."

We see that over and over again throughout the Bible. God will not be hurried. Joseph in the Old Testament is sold into slavery and then imprisoned for 13 years. But by a strange turn of events, which God orchestrated, Joseph becomes the right-hand man of Pharaoh and saves his entire family from starvation because of the famine in the land. But it took 13 years for him to get into a position to save his family.

In the Bible, we see David, a young teenage shepherd boy, being anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of

Israel. David probably thought, "This is great! I wonder when I'll be made king. Maybe next week or maybe next month?" No, he had to wait 13 years before being crowned king.

God's timing is different from ours and usually it takes longer. If He were local, Jesus would say to us, "Try wait! Try wait!" That's the T-shirt logo he would wear. No I is Greater than You (get it?) but "Try wait." There's another local phrase we can refer to, which is, "If can, can. If no can, no can."

The frustrating part of our prayer life is that we believe God CAN. He CAN act fast. But when He takes His time to answer, is He saying, "No can?" Is He not powerful? No, He is powerful but He, in His wisdom, is choosing to wait.

In her encounter with Jesus, the bleeding woman feels UP – here is Jesus, the mighty miracle man! I can touch Him and be cured! But then she experienced a DOWN moment after Jesus publicly pointed her out. He caused her to tell the crowd about her sickness. Forget the HIPA rule of confidentiality of patients. She wanted to just touch Jesus, get healed, and slip away quietly without anyone even knowing it. She wanted a drive-through experience with Jesus.

Have you ever wanted that? Just place your order, get it the way you want it – iced, sugar-free caramel soy latte please—and then zip away? We often want prayer drive-throughs with God. "God, here's my request, and now please answer it so I can be on my way because it is a busy, busy, busy day. Cause I'm a busy, busy, busy important man."

But Jesus says no. Don't come to me just to get healed. Come to me for a life-transforming and meaningful relationship with Me that will see you through an UP, DOWN, but HIGHER moments toward a better life.

That's why we go to Jesus. He's not some maître d' who shows us to the best tables in a restaurant. He's not some waiter who just gives us an awesome meal placed on our table for us just as we like it. No, He's more like the owner of the restaurant and He wants a lifelong friendship with you. Let's go back to Jairus. He sees Jesus yakking, yakking, yakking and listening, listening, listening to this woman who has no social capital. She is poor. She's at the bottom of the social ladder. Jairus doesn't understand why Jesus is making time for her and not him. He's the one with the title and with the money. Now Jairus is feeling like he's being put out in the waiting room. Jesus is doing triage and decides that SHE needs to be attended to first.

Then the story gets worse for Jairus. Some men show up and tell the crowd, "Jairus, your daughter is dead. Don't bother Jesus anymore." Imagine at that moment how Jairus must have given Jesus the biggest stink eye in the world! He must have been seething with rage. He must have been boiling mad. He was probably borderline ballistic.

He may have thought, "Jesus, if we...had just hurried...we could have saved my daughter! But here you are talking with this lowlife, sick woman while my precious daughter is dead!"

When you read the Bible don't miss the drama of the passages, because it often parallels our own drama. Some of you here today may have felt some kind of rage against God long ago. So I am glad you are here to hear this. You may have felt God let you down. How could God let these people hurt my loved ones or me? Where was He when I was praying out loud? I used to trust God. I was UP. But now I am DOWN. Traumatically down! But hang on there's more to the story. A story of how it gets HIGHER.

Jesus ignores what the men have just said, and says to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe." That is God speaking to us today. This is one of our takeaways: Whatever you are going through God is saying, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

Now, in our Bible passage Jesus takes His inner circle, the apostles—Peter James and John—and Jairus to go to Jairus' house. They arrive and there's a huge commotion. People are crying and wailing because the daughter has died. Jesus says the child is not dead but asleep. And how do people respond? They laugh at Jesus. They mock Him. Jesus then clears out the house of all of the doubters and mockers and takes Jairus and his wife and his three key disciples to go inside the room where the child is. He takes the girl by the hand and says to her, "Talitha koum," which means: "Little girl, I say to you get up."

Talitha means little girl, but some translators feel that there's an affectionate touch as one would say, "Honey, get up." Or as we say local style: "Honey girl, get up."

And the girl immediately stood up and walked around! The people were amazed! And as if to prove that the girl is truly alive and not an illusion, Jesus told the parents to give her something to eat. Jesus is so practical—you gotta eat after being dead for a while. UP DOWN HIGHER.

In the first encounter with Jesus Jarius started UP—He sees Jesus as the answer for his dying daughter. Then DOWN—Jesus stops along the way to talk to a bleeding woman while his daughter is dying and then dies. Really Down. But then HIGHER as Jesus, the Lord God, resuscitates her. See the pattern. UP DOWN HIGHER. Look for it in your lives, and if the HIGHER hasn't come yet, then try wait!

In the second encounter with Jesus ... the bleeding woman is UP when she hears Jesus is in town. She literally reaches out to Him and is cured! And she goes DOWN after she's outed and had to tell everyone why she did what she did. But

then she hears from Jesus Himself that it was her faith now that's more important than the healing itself.

Now she has a lifelong relationship with Jesus the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Son of God. HIGHER than you could ever have. And that is ultimately what each of us should have – a relationship with Jesus for He is God, the God who can guide us through the ups and downs of life.

Today is Palm Sunday. Historically, it's the time when we remember the day when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem with a lot of celebration and excitement because the people saw Him as the Messiah. It was the last week of His life on earth. And that week was also THE EPITOME of UP, DOWN, HIGHER.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, children and adults are waving palm fronds. They were celebrating the fact that the possible Messiah was coming to town. This was truly an UP moment. There was a lot of hope, joy, and expectation. The crowd loved Jesus! Popularity at its zenith. The disciples are getting into this – look at the crowds, and hey, I'm with Jesus.

But then He is arrested because of a false charge drummed up by religious leaders. The people could free Him but they choose to free another prisoner named Barabbas instead. So Jesus was mercilessly tortured, crucified, and left to die. That was undoubtedly a DOWN moment. It made the disciples afraid, confused, doubt, and despair. And now like Peter he was saying, I am not with Jesus. Who's He?

But then three days later, Jesus is resurrected. He had been beaten to a pulp, whipped, and nailed to a cross but He somehow comes back to life! This is HIGHER than the disciples could ever have imagined.

And we discover that He is not just a man. But He is God who came to earth in the form of a man to tell us that He is God. We can love Him and trust Him. And someday, He will return. This is the Gospel. This is what the Bible is all about! As we look toward Easter next weekend, be prepared for the biggest celebration of how God will take us HIGHER than ever.

And on Easter, the holiest of holy days in the Christian faith, we will baptize all who would like to be baptized. For some of you, you have the chance to get baptized as you make a full commitment that no matter what the ups and downs in life, you will be a follower of Jesus Christ with the strong firm faith that He can take us higher.

Baptism is like the ring on the finger after making a public commitment in friends of family that I will be loyal forever to this person. Baptism is saying I will be loyal to God and I want my children baptized as an act of faith that we are all dedicated to Christ no matter what the UPS or DOWNS!

For others of you, who might have been baptized as a baby or a child, maybe you will want to renew your baptismal vows by coming forward as the pastors lead you again into the ritual of baptism to re-proclaim your faith in Jesus and re-commit your life to Him.

We may go through some difficult times, but know this: with Jesus we'll experience more grace, more mercy, more joy, and more peace than ever before. For some of you, it is time to come home to the God who loves you. He can lift you from the deepest downs, whatever those may be. For just as He told Jairus, He's telling you also today, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

Amen? Amen! Let's pray.