

# “He Touched Me”

Mark 5:21-43 <sup>1</sup>

My brother is officially an electrical engineer, but his career has really been planted on the boundary between engineering and physics, and he busies himself these days with sub-atomic particles called neutrinos. I don't know much about “particle” physics, but I do have a layman's interest in the subject.

So it was interesting to me that a thousand scientists stood in line all night long in order to have a place in the room where a dramatic announcement about particle physics was going to be made on the morning of July 4, 2012. This announcement was the confirmation of something an entire generation of physicists had believed in for fifty years without having ever seen it.

This “something” was—and now is—a particle known as the “Higgs boson,” whose existence had not previously been proven, but in which physicists nevertheless firmly believed, because all the evidence they could see had convinced them that it *had* to be there.<sup>2</sup> And now, thanks to a \$10 billion underground machine seventeen miles in circumference—the Large Hadron Collider, or LHC—the Higgs boson had been found.

Though it had never been seen, had never been measured, and indeed, had never even been proven to exist, the Higgs boson was believed to be so fundamental in shaping the universe that its nickname had become “the God particle.”

Now isn't that interesting? The most brilliant scientists in the world have believed for fifty years in something they could not see and could not prove, because what they *could* see had convinced them that it had to be there.<sup>3</sup> That should remind you of Hebrews 11:1, where we're told that “*Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*” Hang onto that thought.

In this morning's text, Jesus has returned to the west side of the Sea of Galilee after stilling the storm and healing the Gadarene demoniac. He and His disciples were now back in Jewish territory.

As usual, a large crowd had gathered around Jesus, eager to see what He might say or do next, when suddenly the crowd fell back as one of the most prominent men in town rushed up to Jesus and fell down at His feet—just as the demon-possessed man had done on the other side of the lake. Mark didn't record the names of many people besides the disciples, but Mark did tell us that this man's name was Jairus, and that he was the “ruler” of the synagogue.

The synagogue was the cultural and religious center of a Jewish town, and the “ruler” of the synagogue, like today's “president” of the synagogue, was the most powerful and influential

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on March 26, 2017.

Sources for this sermon include: Barclay, William, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954); Culpeper, Alan, “Mark,” *The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007); Garland, David E. “Mark,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Lane, William, “The Gospel According to Mark,” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Turlington, Henry, “Mark,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1969); Wessell, Walter, “Mark,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke. Digital Version.

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higgs\\_boson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higgs_boson)

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Overbye, “Physicists Find Elusive Particle Seen as Key to the Universe,” *The New York Times*, 4 July 2012; Steve Bradt, “3 Questions: Physicist Christoph Paus discusses newly-discovered particle,” MIT News Office, 4 July 2012.

person in the synagogue leadership. Jairus was at the top of the “pecking order,” and for him to so publicly humble and humiliate himself before this itinerant preacher and miracle worker was amazing beyond words.

Falling on his knees before Jesus, Jairus pleaded desperately, “*My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live*” (Mark 5:23). The word Jairus used for “be healed” is the word from which we get the word, “salvation,” and it seems more than a little strange that Jairus made this plea himself.

Important people generally sent their servants on such errands, and it seems incredible that Jairus would leave his daughter’s deathbed. It may be that Jairus’s family and friends objected to making an appeal to this strange itinerant preacher. Maybe Jairus came to Jesus himself because no one else would go. In response to this impassioned plea, Jesus agreed to go with Jairus, and then the story became even more interesting.

The crowd, now even more curious about what Jesus might do, followed along as Jesus walked with Jairus toward his daughter. Like a crowd at a ball game, they pushed and pulled, pressing against Jesus from every direction, when Jesus suddenly stopped and asked, “*Who touched my clothes?*”

Jesus’ disciples were incredulous, as we would have been ourselves. “*You see all these people crowding against you,*” they said, “*and you ask, ‘Who touched me?!’*”

So here’s the deal. There was a woman in that crowd who had had some sort of hemorrhagic illness for a dozen years. We don’t really know what sort of bleeding she experienced, but if you’ve ever been anemic, you can imagine how awful she must have felt . . . but her situation was much worse than that.

According to the Law of Moses, such bleeding was defiling, and rendered the woman an outcast, much as lepers were. For anyone to touch her, or to touch her clothing, or to touch anything she had touched, would cause them to become ceremonially unclean, so this poor woman lived in a world of ostracism, loneliness, and fear.

As was true for lepers, it was her responsibility to avoid all contact with others, which meant that no other human had likely touched her—at least intentionally—for a dozen years. No hugs, no handshakes, no embraces. She had spent all the money she had on medical care, trying to be healed, but she had only become worse, and now she was completely destitute.

And this woman, like Jairus, had come to the conclusion that Jesus could help her. She was not supposed to be in the crowd at all, but perhaps she had disguised herself so as not to be pushed away. She would never have dared to ask for Jesus’ help outright, but since other people became ceremonially unclean by touching her clothing, she decided that touching Jesus’ clothing might be able to make her clean and well again.

Hoping against hope, she managed to get close enough to touch Jesus’ outer garment, and in the very moment that she touched it, she knew that she had been healed. And at that very same moment, Jesus stopped and asked urgently, “*Who touched me?*”

So why didn’t Jesus, God in human flesh, know who had touched Him? Jesus was fully and completely God, and at one and the same time, Jesus was fully and completely human; and we have only the most rudimentary understanding of what we mean when we say such a thing. Maybe He did know who it was, but He didn’t see her at once, because she was trying to hide.

But now, knowing she had been found out, the woman fell at Jesus' feet, trembling with fear. Perhaps she was afraid of the scorn of the crowd. Maybe she was afraid of being scolded by Jesus. I really think she was afraid in the way the disciples had been out on the lake: "**Who IS this man, that even the blood in my body obeys Him?**"

Some wonder why Jesus subjected the woman to what might seem to be an additional humiliation, but I think what Jesus was doing is really pretty clear. He was doing for her what He would later do for Simon Peter after his denials—Jesus was reinstating her to the community. He publicly blessed her, declared her healed, and restored her to a "touchable" condition.

And while all this was happening, the ambulance motor was running, the lights were flashing, time was passing, and Jairus's daughter's desperate condition worsened. Can you imagine what Jairus was thinking? "*Wait! I was here first! I was in line first! This can wait! My daughter is dying!*"

And, even as Jesus was speaking to this woman, messengers arrived from Jairus's house with the dreaded news, "*Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher anymore?*"

The hopelessness that must have overcome Jairus in that moment is one with which we are more familiar than we want to be. "Where there's life, there's hope," we say. But once death comes, we agree with King David after his baby died—"I will go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23).

We can imagine the despair that suddenly crushed Jairus's heart. Even so, it had been faith that brought Jairus to Jesus in the first place, and now Jesus challenged Jairus to yet more faith: "*Don't be afraid. Just believe.*"

At this point, Jesus dismissed both the crowd and His disciples, with the exception of Peter, James, and John,<sup>4</sup> and the four of them went along with Jairus to his home. As a prominent citizen, Jairus's home was larger than the usual one-room affair, and the mourners had already arrived, crying and wailing loudly.

Jewish mourning customs were very vivid and very detailed, and even the poorest family was expected to have "at least two flutes and one wailing woman," so a man such as Jairus would probably have had to hire more. The scene was loud, chaotic, heart-wrenching, and completely predictable . . . until Jesus arrived.

Jesus spoke to the wailers and asked, "*Why all this commotion? The child is not dead, but asleep.*" Now the fact of the matter is that the girl was indeed dead, and they all knew it, and they laughed at Him. **What they didn't know is that Jesus wakes the dead as easily as we wake the sleeping.**

Jesus put the mourners out, and then He took the girl's parents and His three disciples with Him to the girl's bedside. Jesus simply took the girl by the hand and said two words to her: "*Talitha koum!*" The girl was instantly restored to life, to the astonishment of everyone present—except Jesus, of course.

You probably know that Jesus spoke neither Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written, nor Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament. The common language

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<sup>4</sup> Peter, James, and John were also the only disciples to witness the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13), and they were the ones He took with Him into the agony of Gethsemane (Mark 13:32-42).

of that day in Israel was Aramaic, and “Talitha koum” is Aramaic. The words mean “Little girl, get up!” and Mark translated them for his readers, who were likely Greek speakers.

We might wonder why these Aramaic words were preserved. They were most likely preserved because Mark had gotten them from Peter, who was there, and who had heard Jesus say them. And Peter had probably never been able to think of this moment without hearing those words in his mind.

The moment was indelible. Peter was unable to think of these words in Greek at all. *Talitha koum*. And it was so.

These two vignettes, of Jairus and the woman, are powerfully intertwined, and they have both powerful similarities and powerful contrasts. Our characters occupy opposite ends of just about every spectrum. Jairus is a man, a political and religious leader, of some means and distinction. He is honored by the community and can approach Jesus with a direct request. In contrast, the woman is nameless and unclean. Her illness separates her from the community and makes her unable to attend worship or to be in public with others. Outcast by family, friends, and strangers, she has to approach Jesus in secret and in shame. Just about the only thing they have in common is that they have heard about Jesus, they desperately desire healing, and they have run out of other options.

But the similarities are also striking. Both of these seekers desire “salvation” and fall at Jesus’ feet. Both are afraid; both demonstrate remarkable faith. Both of the persons healed are called “daughter.” One of the women has been ill for twelve years; the other is twelve years old. Both have been rendered ritually unclean, one by bleeding, the other by death. And in both cases, Jesus ignores their uncleanness to bring the touch of healing.

The fact of the matter is that everywhere Jesus goes—both then and now—He leaves behind a trail of transformation: fishermen leave their nets; the sick are healed; storms are stilled; critics are confounded; hunger is relieved; the dead are raised. And it is the same today.

**What we do in a crisis shows what we really believe about God;** and this man and this woman chose to act in faith beyond what they could actually see. They did not exercise “generic” faith. They did not have “faith in faith.” They exercised faith in Jesus.

Now it will be no news to you that evil, sickness, and the deaths of children continue unabated in our world today. Those with sturdy, Jesus-honoring faith still hear the words, “Your child is dead.”

The situations we consider today do not explain the evil in the world, but notice this: if God actively intervened to remedy every situation we face, we would never have to live by faith— and it is by faith that God wants us to live (Romans 1:17).<sup>5</sup> As it is written, “*the righteous will live by faith.*”

Faith in the unseen Higgs boson is one thing; but faith in the Unseen Lord of the Universe is something else altogether. As this same Peter would later write, “*Though you have not seen [Jesus], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls*” (1 Peter 1:8-9).

<sup>5</sup> See also Acts 3:25, 28, 4:13; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 2:16, 3:11; Hebrews 11.

Paul described this same journey of faith by saying, “*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. . . . Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:12-14).

My friends, just as this woman and this man had to believe in Jesus beyond what they could see or understand, so our own goal is to see and to live more deeply by faith in Him. Unfortunately, you and I allow ourselves to be so busy that we probably miss most of what God is doing and speaking. I suspect that most of us would have been so focused on getting to Jairus’s house that we would have never noticed the desperate fingers on our coat.

But even with these failures on our part, **it is just as true today as it was on that long-ago day, that the touch of Jesus can make us whole. And it is still true that all we have to do is to reach out to Him.**

Come, my friend, just as you are. Come and see, come receive, come and live forever! Life everlasting, and strength for today. Taste the living water, and never thirst again.

*Listen! Jesus is calling your name. Come!*