

Kumi Bible Study - Mark 5:21-43 (NRSV)

Scripture Reading: (get rid of verse numbers)

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 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." So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

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?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 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. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Bible Study:

"Talitha Kumi (*Little girl, rise up*)," Jesus says. The instruction seems laughable at first: *how can a dead girl possibly rise?* Yet, with Jesus what seems impossible is made possible; life overcomes death.

Mark 5:21-43 tells the story of two healing miracles: Jairus' daughter who is deathly sick and a woman who had been haemorrhaging. For Mark, these two stories are interwoven. Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, and the bleeding woman both come desperately seeking healing and liberation from their suffering as they approach Jesus. In both cases, Jesus sees them, hears them, and responds.

The themes of this text inspired Sabeel Staff and friends to ask what this story means for life here in our present context. In 2009, Palestinian Christians gathered to write the Kairos Palestine document to proclaim the injustices of the occupation loudly and boldly.

We believe now is the time to move from speaking truth to engaging in action. As we share with you notable themes we found in Mark 5:21-43 and our own experiences, we ask that you reflect on what resonates with you from this story or what ways you may feel invited to rise up in your own community.

Reading the Text through the Palestinian Context

When we read this story in the Palestinian context, it is easy to empathize with the long years of suffering the haemorrhaging woman had undergone and identify with the pain Jairus must have felt when he heard his daughter was dead. Palestinians were forced to leave their homeland in 1948 during the Nakba—which resulted in two-thirds of the Palestinian population becoming refugees scattered throughout the region and around the world. After 1967 war, the Palestinians who were living on the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip came under the military occupation of Israel. Like the haemorrhaging woman, our suffering has been ongoing: the continued construction of settlements, the separation wall, the illegal imprisonment of children, the forcible transfer of communities from their land, and restrictive policies that separate of families.

There are days when it feels like the situation in Palestine and for Palestinians is as hopeless and sorrowful as the news of the death of Jairus' daughter. Since 1967, little has changed for Palestinians. When Palestinian rights continue to be ignored both by Israel and the international community, it is easy to feel as though our hope for a just peace is dead. In our staff bible study participants shared how in the context of ongoing suffering, sometimes we feel angry with God. Our lament—our anger—is a call to God and our broader community to act for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Eli eli lema sabachthani (My God, My God Why have you forsaken me)

The Challenge of Action

Palestinians have responded in different ways to injustice. Within the sphere of NGOs and academia, sometimes we have been so fixated on our events, projects, and activities that it is hard to stop and notice what else is going on around us. Sometimes we are like the disciples and do not see the value of actions that do not fit with our own way of doing things. When Jesus asks, “Who touched me?” the disciples are confused. They question how Jesus could possibly ask this when there are throngs of people surrounding him on every side. One only has to visit the old city of Jerusalem on a busy day, when crowds push up against each other on their way to the Al-Aqsa Mosque to get a sense of what is going on in this scene. We can imagine the disciples wanting to get through the crowd as quickly as possible on their way to their next destination. Yet, Jesus takes time to ask this question and engage with the bleeding woman. Often, it is easy to be like the disciples, to get so caught up in the day-to-day noise and chaos, that we fail to notice the person at the margins crying out for liberation.

Having endured ongoing suffering under occupation, some Palestinians feel the situation is so hopeless they no longer have the energy to act at all. Like the people who came to Jairus and announced, “Your daughter is dead, why bother the teacher anymore?” they question why some continue to put time and energy into actively challenging the occupation when it seems like it is impossible for things to change. Sometimes, people

may even laugh at these efforts of nonviolent resistance because they seem as futile as Jesus trying to heal a girl that has already been proclaimed dead.

Ephphatha (Be opened)

Liberation

At its core, Mark 5:21-43 is a story about healing. In this section we consider three dimensions of healing: hope, agency, and liberation in the midst of ordinary day-to-day life.

Hope plays a central role in the story. After visiting doctors for 12 years without success the bleeding woman has not completely given up hope on finding a cure for her illness. When Jairus hears news that his daughter is dead, Jesus' response is striking: "Don't be afraid; just believe." The call to have hope is challenging. Yet, it is an essential ingredient for steadfastness in continuing to seek liberation. Jesus' words ask us to believe that what might seem laughable, is indeed, possible.

It may indeed be foolish for us to hope that through working together with other organizations in Palestine and our friends in the international community, we can end the occupation. Yet, by God's grace, here we are, proclaiming that where there is death, we see only slumber. What appears to be dead, can rise up. We are committed to remain steadfast in our hope.

In the story hope is paired with agency. Both Jairus and the woman actively approach Jesus. Out of love for his daughter, Jairus leaves his home to find the healer. In a similar display of agency, the bleeding woman courageously reaches out to touch Jesus' cloak. Mark tells us that at that moment Jesus could feel the power come out of him, and the woman was cured—liberated from her suffering. Jesus says, "Your faith has healed you." The woman is not a passive recipient of healing but rather an active participant in her own liberation.

The story of Jairus and the haemorrhaging woman challenges us to continue to act to liberate the people living in this land, both Palestinians and Israelis. Through the Kumi Now initiative, we are reaching out, believing it is possible for the situation in Palestine to be transformed. We, like the woman in Mark's Gospel, are taking the initiative to act based on our faith that the impossible can be made possible.

Finally, the miracles in this story occur in the ordinary moments of everyday life. The haemorrhaging woman is in the midst of a chaotic crowd when she touches a cloak. In the final scene of Mark's gospel story, when, Jesus turns to the little girl and says to her, "Talitha kumi!" rise up. Mark chooses to keep *Talitha Kumi* in the original Aramaic—the everyday spoken language of Jesus and the people even though the gospels are written in Greek. We witness Jesus making something miraculous happen from the ordinary.

The everyday language Jesus uses to heal the little girl encourages us to expect miracles. We witness the power of Jesus breaking into the ordinary moments of our lives. We hear Jesus' command to *rise up* in our own context - to be liberated from suffering like the bleeding woman and to awake from sleep like Jairus' daughter.

Having spoken the truth of our situation, proclaiming the injustice taking place in this land, we say *now* is the time for action. This is why we are launching the Kumi Now initiative—a call to collectively rise up and act for liberation.

Talitha Kumi (Rise Up)