

## A Ham and Cheese Sandwich Read Mark 5:22-43

Mark the gospel writer makes sandwiches. If you are thinking about hoagies, ham and cheese, or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, you are on target. A sandwich customarily requires two slices of bread and, the most essential part for Chef Mark, the filler in the middle. Perhaps an explanation is necessary.

The narratives in the gospel of Mark are constructed together in such a way that Biblical scholars call the technique a “sandwich.” In Mark’s sandwiches, a narrative begins, but is interrupted at mid point by a completely new narrative. At the conclusion of this second narrative, the original narrative resumes. The beginning narrative is considered the first slice of bread. The story that interrupts is the filler—let’s suggest that the filler is made of ham and cheese. In a real sandwich, the ham and cheese is the most significant part. The second slice of bread finishes off the sandwich, just as the resumption of the original story completes Mark’s sandwich and holds it together.

One of the most obvious examples of Mark’s sandwiches is found in Mark 5:22-43. In this text, Mark combines two narratives by layering one story within the other, like a sandwich. By doing this, Mark invites his readers to compare and contrast two characters who come to Jesus for a miraculous healing: Jairus, whose daughter is dying, and an unnamed woman.

The first character to arrive on the scene was Jairus, a wealthy religious ruler of the synagogue. In desperation, he “fell at Jesus’ feet” (Mark 5:22). His daughter, he declared, was “at the point of death” (v. 23). Jairus appealed to Jesus to “come” and put His “hands” on his daughter so that she “would be saved and live” (v. 23). This segment of the narrative is the first slice of bread (vv. 22-24). Following the first slice of bread is the filler—the ham and cheese.

The filler is an interruption to the original narrative. It occurs as Jesus, consenting to Jairus’ plea, was following Jairus to his home. A totally new account about a woman with a never-ending menstrual period breaks in. The woman, like Jairus, sought for salvation from an infirmity. She, however, was not rich—she “had spent all that she had” on doctors. And she, in utter contrast to Jairus’ religious position in the synagogue, would not even have been permitted into a synagogue—she was ritually unclean due to her continuous flow of blood.

A man or woman was considered unclean if they had any sort of a discharge, according to Leviticus 15:19-27. They could not touch or be touched by anyone. Hence, from the time this woman had begun her first period, neither parent nor friend could touch or be touched by her. For this reason, Jesus’ reference to her as “daughter” (in the same way Jairus had referred to his child), demonstrated lofty compassion. She was alone, without the comforting touch of a loved one or the prospect of a husband or children. Her plight was hopeless enough for her to venture out into the crowd that “thronged” Jesus (v. 31). What transpired next is what propelled her story into the center of Mark’s “sandwich.”

Unlike Jairus, who requested that Jesus place His hand on his daughter, this woman merely endeavored to touch Jesus’ garment. “If I may touch but his clothes,” she surmised, “I shall be saved” (v.28). This bold faith became the channel by which Jesus

healed her. Thus, the climax of her story takes place, not when she is healed, but when Jesus acknowledges her gallant faith—"Daughter, your faith has saved you" (v. 34).

The return to Jairus' story signals the final slice of bread in Mark's "sandwich" (vv. 35-43). At the crucial moment in which Jesus validated the faith of the woman, Jairus' servants arrived to announce, "Your daughter is dead" (v. 35). Jairus, in contrast to the woman, must be prompted by Jesus to "have faith" (v. 36). Perhaps the woman's faith provided an example for Jairus, for now the twelve year old daughter of Jairus was as ritually unclean at death as the woman had been for twelve years of her life. Jesus then entered Jairus' house, took the daughter's hand, and "saved" her by pronouncing, "Little girl, arise" (v. 41).

Instead of merely dictating the two separate stories in consecutive order, which might not lead us to compare and contrast the two main characters, Mark makes a sandwich. The woman's profound faith is further emphasized by placing her story in the center of the first narrative. In this way, the reader is clearly encouraged to discern the main point Mark is making—it is through faith that Jesus' power saves.