



## The Time Barrier

Mark 5:21-43

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We have been studying the past couple weeks what it means to love your neighbor. This command by Christ is named as being a foundational tenant of our faith. Coupled with loving God, loving one's neighbor is offered by Christ himself as the greatest of the commandments.

The past couple weeks we've talked about narrowing our focus and getting past some of our first hesitations to living out this command. For the purpose of practice, we are taking away the excuse that we don't really know who is defined as being 'our neighbor.' Our focus as we re-learn what it means to love our neighbor is on our literal neighbors: the people who live in closest proximity to us. We first said we need to love where we live, claiming and acknowledging God's desire for us to share in community in the space where we live. That begins with us getting to know the names of the people who live around us. After all, how can you love who you don't know?

Last week, we said that the commandment isn't asking us to share a metaphorical love with our metaphorical neighbors in metaphorical ways. Christ actually wants us to share real love with our real neighbors in real ways. That requires a deeper level of familiarity than just knowing the names of the people around us – we have to know who they are more deeply (their passions, gifts, needs, wants, longings, griefs, and joys). To live out the *great commandment* literally, we have to find the places where literal love is needed in the lives of our literal neighbors.

Such a love is necessary. It's not just necessary because Christ says we should do it – I mean, that's an important reason too. But there's a reason Christ claims this as the greatest commandment. When we love God and love our neighbor, the world is as God wanted it to be. God did not create the world to live in the kind of chaos and disorder we see today. Just look at the creation story – God created the peaceful garden, where love of God and love of one another were in perfect harmony. Before we stopped loving God and starting loving the idea of being God, before we ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, there was perfect harmony. Humanity was in balance with creation and itself, and creation and humanity were in humble awe of the Creator. It is *that* image of creation – the image of the perfect garden – that God called *good*.

We are called to love God and love our neighbor because that is the image God wants for the created. We aren't called to wait for such love to be seen and shown in full again at the eschaton (the final days). We aren't called to love just a few people now, perhaps to love those who think and look like us, and wait to see if God has us loving others at Christ's return. Such love is necessary because our loving one another is what corrects our wrongs, what heals our

pains, what comforts our griefs, what provides food for the hungry, what provides shelter for the homeless, and what provides family and community for all of God's created humanity.

Our call to share that love is not so we can live happier, or because *love is all you need*, as the Beatles tried to teach us some 50 years ago. Our call to share such love with our neighbor is because that is how we live out God's will for humanity.

But you know what? Such an idyllic vision of love is hard to fathom. I mean, it sounds all well and good, but we all have our laundry list of reasons why we write such love off as too hard or impossible.

Friends, living out God's desire for humanity, being faithful to God's will for us, the beloved and created of God, it's not for the faint of heart. Being faithful to God's will is costly – just ask Jesus, or Stephen, or Paul, or any number of the other people of faith who have given their lives to be faithful to the call of Christ to love God and to love their neighbors. Being faithful to Christ's teaching, living the great commandment literally, it requires we reframe what faithful living looks like, and learn to make sacrifices in the "my way or the highway" mentality that pervades our societal body at large. This week and next week we're going to look at a couple of those boundaries that keep us from more faithfully living out Christ's call to love our neighbor. This week, we begin with *The Time Barrier*.

In their book, *The Art of Neighboring*, authors Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon claim that the number one obstacle to neighboring well is time. There are but 168 hours in a week. The average person spends 50-60 of those hours in bed at night – perhaps some crushing candy and reading the news, and some sleeping. The average American works 34.4 hours per week, with full-time employees working an average of 47 hours per week. Prepping for meals, cooking, and eating can take 10-20 hours per week. We spend on average 11 hours a week in the car. That doesn't take into account the necessary time spent showering, dressing, household chores, or running necessary errands, like going to the grocery store. When you add it all up, if this kind of schedule is normative for you, you might be left with just 20 hours a week of flexible time to use in other ways. That doesn't account for time spent caring for children, driving them to and from sporting events or extracurricular activities. It doesn't account for family obligations, like caring for elderly or infirmed parents or siblings. There's just not much time left.

With so much to do, and so little time to do it, it's no wonder that if you ask someone in Northern Virginia, or the greater DC area, "How are you doing?", the most popular one-word response you get is, *busy*. ... "Everyone is busy, and we all have different stories and struggle with different issues that compete for our attention and our time."<sup>i</sup>

Perhaps that's why today's scripture is so foreign for us, and so hard for us to really understand. Mark 5 offers us this account of Jesus and Jairus' daughter, and the woman in the crowd.

To understand the full weight of the text, you have to know the players. Jesus has crossed over the sea and has come ashore, and immediately he is surrounded by a crowd. Jesus has made a

name for himself as a travelling rabbi who performs miracles, giving sight to the blind, food to the hungry, and others. As the crowd is gathering around him, a leader in the synagogue, named Jairus, comes up to him and throws himself at Jesus' feet. Before we even hear what he has to say, his actions speak volumes of his situation.

Jairus isn't just a faithful Jewish man, he is a leader of the synagogue. He's a powerful man in the community. He's wealthy, and is respected by those around him. Yet, he comes to Jesus for help. "By coming to Jesus, Jairus tacitly acknowledges that whatever authority he possesses [as a leader in the synagogue] is surpassed by that given to Jesus."<sup>iii</sup> ... And he doesn't just come to Jesus and make a request, he falls down at the feet of Jesus and begs him, repeatedly. This man is desperate, hurting, and looking for help – and all for good reason. Jairus' daughter is at the point of death.

So, having had this man of power come to him, having had this respected man in the local community beg before him, Jesus goes with him.

As they are going, a large crowd pressed in on him. The disciples clearly had not been to Secret Service school – there was not protected path for Jesus, there were no barricades lining the roads keeping the people back, there were no body guards pushing people away. As Jesus walked, the people pressed in on him. They wanted to be close to him.

Among the crowd there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. Many a scholar suggest this was menstrual bleeding, though there is no evidence in the story to confirm or deny such a claim. She had been to every physician she could find to seek treatment. Perhaps because their health care system offered as poor a benefits package as many of ours, she ran out of money seeking treatment. She had too high an out of pocket limit. Now she's a broke and bleeding woman, whose health only was getting worse. Desperate for any kind of help she can find, she presses through the crowd behind Jesus, and she just gets close enough to touch his cloak. Mark tells us that immediately upon touching Jesus' cloak, her bleeding sopped. Without pause, she knew that she had been healed of her disease.

Jesus senses that someone has touched him and stops, asking, "Who touched my clothes?" In response, the disciples speak for all of us, "Jesus, you can see everyone is pressing in on you. Why are you asking, 'Who touched me?'"

I mean, come on Jesus. ... Does it bother anyone else that Jesus never seems to be in a hurry to go anywhere? My type-A just wants to yell at him. "Jesus – come on! Keep moving, we have places to be!" ... I'm confessing to you now church, those are the same words I use to chastise the cars around me who aren't going at least 5-10 over the posted speed limit. Those are the same word I mutter under my breath when the person in front of me at the grocery store can't figure out how to use the self-check out line. Those are the same words I have to refrain from screaming at my boys when they can't get themselves dressed in the morning and we have places to be. ... "Jesus – come on! Keep moving, we have places to be!" ... Jesus is never in a hurry, and it drives me crazy.

His pause in this story, his lack of hurry to save the dying daughter, says a lot about what matters to Jesus. Jesus is delaying his trip to save the daughter of a powerful man, a leader in the synagogue, *NOT* to heal the woman who was bleeding – she’s already been healed! He pauses because the work is not yet done. Her physical healing was only part of what was needed. As a bleeding woman, she was a double outcast in society. Her bleeding made her unclean, and she was a woman – she was powerless.

She came before him a second time, this time in fear and trembling. She had fear for good reason - her touching Jesus’ cloak would have been an act worthy of punishment. Her act would have made Jesus ritually unclean. It would have brought even greater shame and pain upon her. ... So there she is, now kneeling at Jesus’ feet, in the same position Jairus had been in only moments earlier, and Jesus speaks to her, “Daughter ...” ... don’t miss the way her addresses her, he has already offered her grace by addressing her as one who is loved ... “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Jesus is in no hurry, because healing takes time – and this woman needed healing that went beyond the stopping of her bleeding, she had turmoil deep within. And let’s be real, Jesus never misses an opportunity to commend someone on their faith. Faith for Jesus is always the answer to healing. Jesus speaks grace into her turmoil and pain – “your faith has saved you; now, be at peace.” She is physically healed; she is spiritually healed; and she is mentally healed.

I can only imagine what Jairus is thinking as Jesus is engaging with this woman. I can just see him getting more and more anxious and upset – “Jesus – come on! Keep moving, we have places to be!” ... but before he can speak, someone who had been with his daughter at the house came to them and said, “your daughter is dead.”

Not to leave her behind, the woman, no longer bleeding, would not have been privy to where Jesus was headed. Yet, being there at Jesus’ feet, she now knows that her interruption of Jesus has caused him to delay and has likely been the cause of Jairus’ daughter’s death. Her healing meant the girl’s death. But, Jesus doesn’t seem to mind, he moves on to the house.

Of course, Jesus is Jesus, and he does what Jesus does best. He finds the girl – challenges those who are wailing and keeping watch over her, “Why such commotion, the girl is not dead but sleeping.” Oh to have such faith as Christ and see death as a mere nap. He calls to her, “Little girl, get up!” She got up and began to walk about.

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For busy people, who like Jesus tend to get interrupted when important tasks need completing, this story can cause great anxiety. For people of power, who expect to get what they want the way they want it, this story can cause be troubling. For parents, grandparents, teachers, or caretakers – all who love children – this story can be upsetting. Jesus, on his way to heal the

daughter of a person of power, took a break on his way to engage with a woman who was a nobody in society – a powerless and unclean woman.

Yet for Jesus, “Love and hurry are fundamentally incompatible.”<sup>iii</sup>

If we are going to start living the great commandment more literally, if we’re going to actually be faithful to Christ’s teaching and place importance around this whole *love thy neighbor* thing, then we have to be willing to learn from Christ’s modeling. We have to realign our time, and rethink the way we use our time, to ensure our time models our commitment to loving our neighbor.

We have to be willing to turn our planned schedule on its head; we have to be willing to be late, even to important events, because someone else needs to have the love of God shared with them. We have to stop packing our schedules so full that we have no time to share such love in our community. Being interruptible means a willingness to be inconvenienced. And that is hard, friends. It’s hard to give up, put aside, or sacrifice our wants, our desires, our schedule, our hopes, and our dreams just because someone else has a need – but that is the call of Christ in the great commandment. It takes “real courage to begin to eliminate and create enough space to be great neighbors.”<sup>iv</sup>

Living this way is not something God hopes we’ll eventually get around to – it’s how God created us! We were created to be for others a witness to such love that has so powerfully impacted our lives, that in the emptiness, yearning, and pain of the lives of others, they may find healing through our willingness to love them – as neighbors, to share love with one another. So may use the time God has gifted us to focus on what matters, and keep in front of us Christ’s call to love one another. For in doing so, our faith not only heals us, but it heals the community. For the glory of God – Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon. *The Art of Neighboring*. Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2012.

<sup>ii</sup> Mark D. W. Edington. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary. Year B, Volume 3*. Eds. Barbara Brown Taylor & David L. Bartlett. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009.

<sup>iii</sup> John Ortberg. *The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

<sup>iv</sup> Pathak & Runyon.