

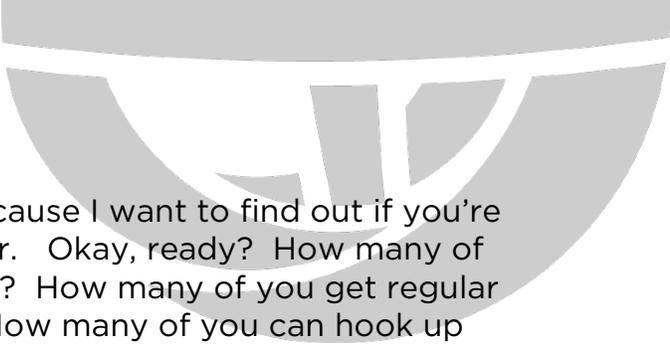
Jesus Restores the Broken to Life  
Pastor Vern Christopherson

**Mark 5:21-43 NRSV**

<sup>21</sup>When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. <sup>22</sup>Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet <sup>23</sup>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.” <sup>24</sup>So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. <sup>25</sup>Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup>She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup>She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup>for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” <sup>29</sup>Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. <sup>30</sup>Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” <sup>31</sup>And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” <sup>32</sup>He looked all round to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup>But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup>He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

<sup>35</sup>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?” <sup>36</sup>But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” <sup>37</sup>He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. <sup>38</sup>When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup>When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” <sup>40</sup>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. <sup>41</sup>He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” <sup>42</sup>And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. <sup>43</sup>He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.



Time for a survey...and I'm taking this survey because I want to find out if you're the kind of folks who've got your act all together. Okay, ready? How many of you studied hard and got good grades in school? How many of you get regular check-ups from the doctor? And the dentist? How many of you can hook up your own Internet service at home and don't need any help from friends, children, or grandchildren? How many of you have no trouble getting everything done on your to-do list? How many of you never have feelings of loneliness? And last but not least—for those of you over 65—how many of you thought that signing up for Medicare was going to be a breeze?

I've got news for you: this week's gospel reading is perfect for all the people out there who don't have it all together. Now, I know what you're thinking: that means all of us, right? Sure, except we're not always ready to admit it, are we?

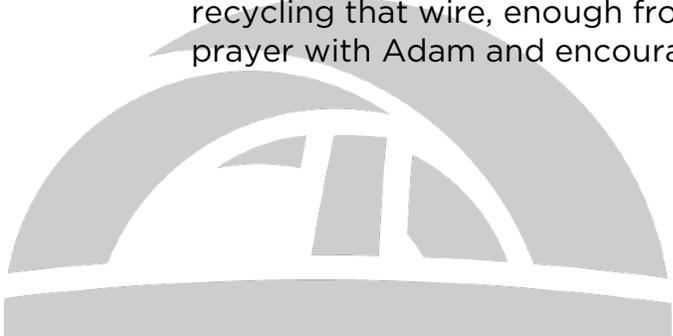
I think this might be especially true in a place like Rochester. There's so much competency here, so many academic degrees, so much professional expertise. We have a lot invested in having it all together, or at least looking like we do. So, what happens when things fall apart for a while? Researcher Brene Brown writes that one of the hardest things for us to do is be vulnerable, to come across like we don't have it all together.

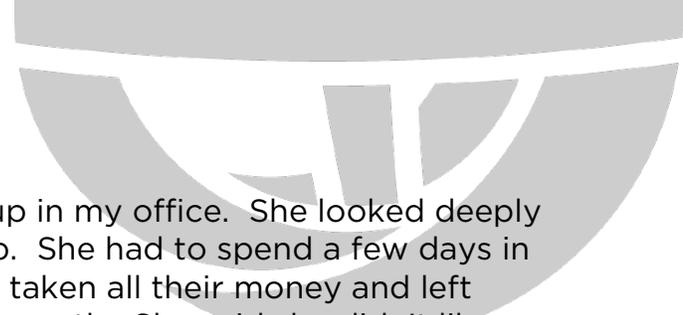
In the last couple weeks I've run into some rough-around-the-edges folks who've been struggling with this. It might have something to do with winter in Minnesota. Life always seems harder in the winter.

Three persons in particular stand out. Each has a story to tell. They often show up on Saturday mornings when I'm working on my sermon. You know, when I'm trying to do the Lord's work...and am really not sure if I want to get involved.

Two weeks ago we were having a blizzard. A guy name Joe came by. He was Native American, coming from the Rosebud Sioux tribe in South Dakota. He was looking for help in getting a bus ticket to Madison, Wisconsin. He wanted to stay with his daughter for the rest of the winter and find a job. I said a prayer with Joe, walked him over to the Sinclair station, and purchased a one-way ticket to Madison. It cost \$26.

As I was walking back from Sinclair, it was beginning to snow harder. The wind was picking up. I saw a guy digging through our yellow construction dumpster in front of the building. I introduced myself. He said his name was Adam. He was picking out strips of wire that had been thrown away. He hoped it was okay. He showed me his backpack. It was almost full. He said he could get \$40 for recycling that wire, enough from him to get by for the next several days. I said a prayer with Adam and encouraged him to *go for it!*





A week later a woman named Jessica showed up in my office. She looked deeply troubled. She said her fiancé had beaten her up. She had to spend a few days in the hospital recovering. Her now ex-fiancé had taken all their money and left town. Jessica's rent was due on the first of the month. She said she didn't like asking for a handout, but could we help? I said a prayer with Jessica, gave her my card, and asked her to have the landlord call. A few hours later he did. He must have been in a generous mood. He said, "With \$100 from Jessica and \$100 from us, she could stay in her basement apartment for another month."

There are three characters in this story of mine. One common theme: desperation. Life had been hard. They didn't have it all together. Each in their own way had been vulnerable. They stopped at Zumbro, I suppose, not because we're a social service agency, but because we're followers of Jesus. Of course, we can't help everyone, but it makes me wonder: *To what surprising places does Jesus want to take us? What seemingly broken people could use a helping hand?*

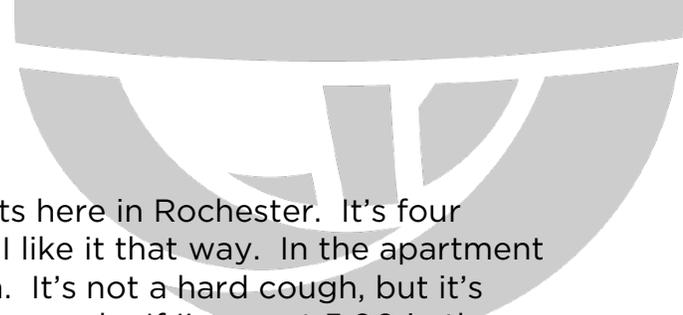
There are three main characters, in addition to Jesus, in our reading from Mark. Each has a story to tell, but with one common theme: desperation. They don't have it all together. Jairus is a leader of the synagogue. He comes to Jesus to ask a favor. Not all Jewish leaders found Jesus' message attractive, but evidently Jairus did. Again, he's a leader. Leader's are trained to be competent, to get things done, to keep it all together. Until, that is, your twelve-year-old girl gets sick, really sick, maybe even sick to the point of death.

My daughter Ingrid had her first seizure when she was about that age. They even had a name for it: juvenile onset epilepsy. Whatever it's called, it's a scary thing when our kids get sick. Like Jairus, we're willing to try just about anything.

Oh, we can understand why Jairus runs to Jesus himself, instead of sending an emissary. We can understand why he throws himself at Jesus' feet, rather than look him in the eye. And we can understand why he does not ask politely, but rather *begs*, for Jesus to come home with him. Jairus is desperate. His love for his daughter has left him utterly vulnerable.

The unnamed woman in our reading is pretty much the exact opposite of Jairus. She's not a leader. She has no social standing. There's no one to go the teacher on her behalf. And if that's not enough, she's been bleeding for twelve years. Mark doesn't emphasize the bleeding. But according to Jewish law, it would have rendered her "impure" and cut off from her community. Even more importantly, it probably would have kept her from having children. The woman quietly sneaks throughs the crowd, seeking only to touch the cloak of this healer. She's desperate. She's hoping against hope for an end to her illness, whatever it takes. And it has left her utterly vulnerable.





My home away from home is Hillside Apartments here in Rochester. It's four blocks west of the church. It's generally quiet. I like it that way. In the apartment below me, however, there's a man with a cough. It's not a hard cough, but it's very persistent. If I'm up at midnight, I hear the cough. If I'm up at 5:00 in the morning I hear the cough. It doesn't bother me, and I sleep with a box fan, so I don't hear it at night. But it's been going on for the last four or five years. Every so often I hear the cough and feel sorry for the man. I can only imagine how exhausting that cough must be, almost as exhausting as bleeding for twelve straight years.

Finally, there's a young girl in our reading. It's easy to forget about her. But focus in for a minute: She's twelve years old – an important age. In that day, the age of twelve regularly signaled the onset of menstruation, of gaining the ability to bear life, of adulthood. Yet, from the sounds of it, this young girl may not live to see it. She's desperate. A mysterious illness had left her utterly vulnerable.

We were in shock last Sunday as we heard the news coming out of Los Angeles: Kobe Bryant had been killed in a helicopter crash. As we listened further, we found out that Kobe's 13-year-old daughter, Gianna, was with him. How very sad! Gianna had hopes and dreams of going to Connecticut to play basketball, and hopes and dreams of one day playing in the WNBA. But a thick fog rolled in that morning. The helicopter crashed. And all nine passengers died. Gianna's life ended much too quickly. Family and friends were devastated. As the tragic news spread, they were overwhelmed with grief, much like those mourners who gathered in Jairus' home.

Three characters had come to Jesus. Each in his or her own way was desperate. Each was vulnerable. One thing seems abundantly clear: they'd given up any need to have it all together, or at least to pretend to. No, they'd come to Jesus exactly as they were: broken people desperately in need of healing and hope.

So, what do we do with a story like this? I have a couple of ideas. First, we can begin to change the way we think about vulnerability. Again, Brene Brown is helpful. When things go wrong, she says, we often end up feeling exposed and desperate. Still, Brown nudges us toward open and honest vulnerability, much like those stories do in Mark. Only by admitting our vulnerability, Brown says, are we able to find the courage we need to act differently. Who knows, maybe admitting our need won't be the end of the world, just the end of the world we've so carefully constructed. And if we leave behind that carefully constructed world—this is important—we may be able to accept ourselves and others as *good enough* anyway. We may enter a new world of forgiveness, acceptance, and mutual regard. Jesus has a name for this world. It's called *the kingdom of God*.





A second thing we can do: we can pledge to work at being a community where people don't need to have it all together. A tagline for Wednesday worship is: *Come as you are*. This was meant, at least at the beginning, to include blue jeans and t-shirts instead of suits, ties, and dresses. But what if we took that a step further? What if we pledged to be a community that works to restore the broken to life, a community that accepts limitations and honors vulnerability? How different would that feel? How welcoming and supportive could we become?

Peggy North of Zumbro has been battling stage 4 colon cancer for a number of years. Every other week Peggy gets chemotherapy—not to cure the cancer but hopefully to hold it at bay. Peggy also spends time online looking for additional treatments options. Now, Peggy is a retired doctor. She looks for reputable studies. Somewhere along the way—she can't remember where—she read about a diet including purple potatoes that had proven beneficial in controlling her kind of cancer. Peggy is quick to add: "I'm not necessarily encouraging people to go out and buy purple potatoes, but I was feeling desperate. I was willing to give it a try."

Peggy went to the local Hy-Vee. They were out of purple potatoes. They ordered some for her. According to Peggy, she's been eating purple potatoes for the last four months. And, would you believe, her latest CT scan was noticeably better than the one before. She was very encouraged.

Peggy order more potatoes. When the produce manager asked her why she was eating so many purple potatoes—did she really like flavor—Peggy had a moment of vulnerability. She said, "No, it's not the taste. I'm eating them because I have cancer, and I read an article in a medical journal that said they might be helpful. I was willing to try because someday I feel like I'm almost out of options." The manager replied, "Thank you for telling me. I will pray for you." Peggy was deeply moved by his sincerity and care.

Our gospel story is perfect for those who don't have it all together. That would be people like Joe and Adam and Jessica; people like Jairus and the bleeding woman and Jairus' daughter; people like Peggy North; people like you and me.

To be honest, I don't expect that Jesus, incredible as he is, is going to heal every disease and even raise our dead. But I do believe this: when we go to Jesus with our desperation and vulnerability, he will not leave us exactly as he found us. Broken people will be restored to life. And that is good news indeed. Amen.



