

Time was running out. With each passing second, Jairus, an important leader in the local synagogue, could feel his daughter's life slipping through his hands. His heart ached as he'd watched her go in and out of consciousness. One moment her teeth would chatter as the fever sent chills throughout her little body. The next moment, her temperature would spike, causing her to sweat through her clothes and kick off her sheets. Turning his eyes toward heaven, Jairus prayed, *Oh God, be merciful. Please spare this child.* Time was running out.

After all, she was only twelve-years-old—she had her whole life in front of her. In that culture, she was fast approaching the age of marriage—but right now that was all getting thrown out the window. No husband, no children, no life. In this story, she doesn't even have a name—just Jairus' daughter. How tragic—before things even begin for her, they're already coming to an end. And when her spirit does leave her little body, what remains will be ceremonially unclean. The Law says not to touch a dead body. Time was running out.

Outside that very community lived another woman, whose time also had been running out. Like the little girl, we don't know her name either. We know she probably wasn't twelve years old, but we do know that for twelve long years she'd suffered from a flow of blood that just would not stop. And also like Jairus' daughter, it was this hemorrhaging that made her ceremonially unclean too. In fact, this woman and that girl had a lot in common—in different ways, their lives were both pretty much over. For the woman it was more figurative, of course, but nevertheless her uncleanness had forced her from her community—she was quarantined, untouchable, cast out. Just think—no love, no warmth, no kindness—the only thing people saw when they looked at her was a monster. What kind of life was that? She might as well be dead.

But here's really why her time was running out—this whole thing affected her ability to bear children in a culture where a woman's worth was measured most by motherhood. Without children, she was accursed, no legacy, her life meaningless—and before long, her biological clock would be up and there'd be no chance left for her. Sure, she had seen doctor after doctor after doctor—all of them happy to take her money, but none of them able to treat her. In fact, all they could do, the text tells us, was actually make her problem worse. Now, for this poor, sad woman, time was running out.

We believe that the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word. The Holy Spirit is, no doubt, the divine author of all Scripture. But we also believe that God works through people—and the Bible is no different. He takes their own personal gifts and abilities and He uses them for His holy purposes.

That's like the Gospels—they are historical records, yes, but they are artistically and purposefully crafted, like any good book. And in this Gospel account, we discover Mark's literary genius. Here are two stories that he so skillfully intertwines. Their commonalities are obvious—two females with no names. One age twelve, the other suffering for twelve years. The girl is about to be ceremonially unclean, the woman is ceremonially unclean. And both of them are running out of time.

But part of Mark's genius isn't just in the art of intertwining these two stories, but in his ability to intertwine you and me into them as well. God knows all of us can relate to these two women. Not only their stories come together, but so do ours. Yes, people might know our names, twelve might not be a particularly significant number for us. But for everyone gathered in this room, in one way or another, we know what it's like to be on the outs, to feel unclean and out of place. And maybe even more, not a one of us doesn't feel the press, as—someway, somehow—our time is running out.

There's the husband and wife who've grown apart over the years—"It's no use anymore," they say, "time has run out for this marriage." There's the guilt-stricken conscience, so trapped in sin it fears it can never break free—"There's no hope for me anymore. I'll never overcome this temptation. Time has run out for me." There's the patient, told by the doctor they only have weeks to live—"I guess this is it now. My time up." How does your story go? How is time running out for you?

Now, if you've gotten to know me at all, then you might be aware that I'm an art lover. Painting, sculpture, you name it—I love the visual arts. But I also appreciate theater and film, literature, and, of course, music. There's nothing like being pulled into the canvas, the page, the big screen, the stage, or the orchestra pit. And, oftentimes, when something really captivates me, it's because it's a lot like something I have experienced myself. It resonates to my core, and I say, *Oh yes, I know this! I've felt this before! I know what that's like!* Great art does that. I see Picasso's giant all-encompassing mural *Guernica*, for example, and even though I've never had to live through a war, I say, *I understand fear, I get destruction, I know chaos! In my own way, I've lived that.* Maybe art has also grabbed you that way before. And that's the kind of thing that Mark's doing this morning.

But I've found that the best art doesn't stop there, doesn't just draw you into the problem. But the best art any of us can find also points us beyond, to a solution. The best art has the power to pull you into not only the drama of life, but the best art even has the power to help move you toward resolution. In it, you experience beauty, get swept up in hope and encouragement. You're given a glimpse into a world that can be, receive the gift of future possibilities. I think of Caravaggio's *Conversion on the Way to Damascus*. In that masterpiece, there's a great use of darkness, drawing us into that intense moment of blindness for St. Paul. Because, honestly, who of us doesn't know shadows, haven't gone through some dark days ourselves? But the lighting, the lighting washes over Paul, Illuminating Christ's ultimate disposition toward him, giving us a glimmer of Paul's new life. And seeing this, I just know this is for me—Paul's outstretched arms implore Christ for help, but those are also my arms open wide eager to receive grace from heaven. Well, Mark's Gospel is like that—it's great art, pointing us toward a hopeful future.

You see, Mark isn't just brilliant because he intertwines the stories of these two women, or because he writes in such a way that we're able to identify with them, our own personal stories intertwined with theirs. No, what makes Mark so brilliant is that intertwining with such hopeless, tragic stories of uncleanness and death is the promising story of Jesus Christ. Mark knows that well before the stories of these women are ever told, God's story began with creation. And Mark also knows that when God's story ends it won't end with time running out, no—but God's story ends with restoration. And because Mark knows that God's story starts with creation and ends with restoration, he knows that everything that happens in between finds a part in that wonderful story of God, who enters into a dying creation and brings it to life once again.

This is just what happens for that woman. Her time was running out, on account of her uncleanness her life seemed over, but the Creator God stands before her in the person of Jesus Christ. He was there at the original creation, and He will be there at the final restoration and new creation. And all it takes is His touch and she finds herself remade, better than she ever was before. In Jesus, the same God who reached His hands down into the earth, scooping it up and gently molding it into the first human being, has now entered into creation—and is creating once again. With just a touch, He has come and is creating this woman anew, making her clean, and giving her back her life. And while we don't know what happens to her—Mark never airs a *Where Are They Now?* episode—I like to think that, for this woman, time never ran out, but that she got the family she always wanted.

This happens also for Jairus' daughter—she too is encountered by the Creator God. Oh, I know at first it seems as if her time isn't just running out, but has *run* out. I mean, the mortician's on his way, the funeral bulletins are being printed, they've already got the caterer on the phone. What do the people say to Jairus? Probably some of the most heartbreaking words ever spoken in Scripture—breaking the tragic news to him, they say, "Your daughter is dead. C'mon, let's not bother the Teacher anymore." In other words, "Time has run out." But what they don't realize is that their lives have gotten intertwined not only with the God of creation but the God of restoration.

It wasn't too late, it never is—not in God's story. No story ends in tragedy when it's written into the greater story of God. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End, creating in Genesis and restoring in Revelation. And into the destruction and darkness of death, the God who spoke life into the formlessness and void, into the darkness that was over the face of the deep, speaks life again. Jesus might not say verbatim, "Let there be light," but I think you'll agree the meaning's the same—Jesus says, "Little girl, I say to you arise." And just as instantaneously as there was light at God's

command, Mark tells us that “immediately” she gets up and starts to walk around. Just like in the beginning, God created by speaking, now in the beginnings of this little girl’s new life, God’s Word creates once more.

For you, this happens all over again. Sure, time seems to be running out—or maybe like Jairus’ daughter, you feel like time’s already run out. But that story’s too small. No, entering into your created world is none other than your Creator God. In just ten more chapters of his gospel, Mark will reveal the fullness of God’s story. In Jesus Christ, the Creator will Himself be uncreated. Crucified, He will know firsthand what it’s like for time to run out—and bearing the sin of the world, He will know the full meaning of what it is to be ‘unclean.’ But by His death, all uncleanness is cleansed by the blood of Christ, and it is by His rising again that every tragic ending gives way to life anew—life we saw for those two women, and life . . . for you. For you, it’s impossible for time to run out; for you, there’s no such thing as ‘unclean,’ because Jesus has brought you into God’s greater story.

And right now, as you are pulled into that story, the God’s story is being drawn into you. If you ever see a potter at the wheel, you’ll notice something as He lovingly, intimately spins the clay. His hands get lost in his work—you don’t know where the potter ends and the clay begins—the artist is intertwined with His art. God so intertwined you into His story, that there’s no telling where His ends and yours begins. Reaching out with His body and blood today, the Creator God who grabbed some dirt and molded a man, who touched that woman and fashioned a new life for her, touches you. And as you hear His Word this morning, the Creator God who breathed a whole universe into existence, who commanded the dead to rise, now speaks new life into you. And leaving this place as a new creation of God, you leave here as a great work of art—pointing people beyond the dramas of this world, toward the life of the world to come.