

## Title: Illustrations of Faith

Subtitle: The difficulties and triumphs of two individuals who persevered in faith.

Video: [https://youtu.be/8VQPUV\\_8uU?si=NMGgN9x7rQCaAvjW](https://youtu.be/8VQPUV_8uU?si=NMGgN9x7rQCaAvjW)

Can anyone imagine a story more filled with the drama and difficulty of walking in faith more remarkable than these two stories we find in our Gospel today? These two accounts are so significant that they are recorded in all three synoptic Gospels.

First, there is the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, had exhausted all of her options, and had spent all she had. In the other incident, Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter lies with her life hanging in the balance near death's door.

Here are two distinct representations of humanity: one rich, the other poor; one well respected, the other alone with no one to speak on her behalf. Both were beyond natural help and needed divine intervention. Yet, simultaneously, they hoped against all apparent hope and experienced answers to their prayers, providing us with a living illustration of what faith looks and feels like.

When the woman with the issue of blood is healed, Jesus asks, ***“Who touched my garments?”***<sup>1</sup> Then ***“the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth.”***<sup>2</sup>

The whole truth was that the woman was “unclean.” She was the victim of uncontrollable bleeding, which she had suffered for 12 years. The Mosaic Law declared that such a condition rendered a person “unclean.” This pronouncement

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 5:30

<sup>2</sup> Mark 5:33

meant that she was unfit to come before God and that she had no place in the worship or fellowship with God's people. Moreover, those who knew of her condition were to stay away from her for fear that they, too, might also become "unclean."

Her story perfectly illustrates how difficult it is to express faith, especially when you know and feel unworthy to come before God with your needs. These feelings are familiar to us all and must be dealt with if we dare to confidently approach God. Thomas Cranmer, who compiled and edited the first Book of Common Prayer, understood this and included a place for a confession of sin with a declaration of forgiveness in each of the prayer services. This assurance is built upon God's great and precious promise, ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***<sup>3</sup> Taking such steps opens us to the possibility that God can love you even though, in your own eyes or the eyes of the world, you see nothing of value there. When faith reaches out to God, it does not trust in its own charms, in its own beauty, or in its own loveliness. Instead, it trusts in God's boundless ability to love and accept us regardless of our shortcomings and needs. He will not pass by and ignore us in the crowd or despise our grasping for him. Instead, he will stop in his tracks—despite the urgency of anyone else's needs and heedless of what someone else might think. Therefore, with all that was against her, she pressed on and pressed into the crowd surrounding Jesus, believing, ***"If I touch even his garments, I will be made well."***<sup>4</sup> Her faithful actions were richly rewarded, for she was granted an audience with Christ and heard the words of

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<sup>3</sup> 1 John 1:9

<sup>4</sup> Mark 5:28

assurance, “*My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.*”<sup>5</sup>

Jairus’ story is similar but with a different twist. Here is a man, highly esteemed as a leader in his synagogue, falling down at the feet of Jesus and begging 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>6</sup>

Here is a man willing to leave behind his cherished status in his world to seek life and healing for his daughter. If Jairus does not go looking for Jesus and does not implore Jesus to come and heal his daughter, there is no doubt whatsoever that she will die. Jarius put his faith into action by resisting the voice of fatalism and hopelessness in the messengers who interrupted his journey and announced, “*Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?*”<sup>7</sup> Instead, Jairus heeded Jesus’ words, “*Do not fear, only believe,*”<sup>8</sup> and kept walking with the Master even when his hope for healing seemed lost.

Once again, to make this message applicable, I ask you to put yourself in his shoes. Haven’t you ever wondered if it was your place to “trouble the master” about your needs? Most of us try to arrange our lives so that we have to trust God for very little. We might be cautious, rule-keeping religious people, but to move beyond that into becoming risk-takers in search of the power of the Kingdom of Heaven manifested through Jesus of Nazareth is a wholly different thing.

Jairus’s faith moved him away from fear, where he could have thrown in the towel and quickly given up. Barbara Brown Taylor (an Episcopal priest and published author) describes such

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<sup>5</sup> Mark 5:34

<sup>6</sup> Mark 5:23

<sup>7</sup> Mark 5:35

<sup>8</sup> Mark 5:36

faith as “not a well-fluffed nest, or a well-defended castle high on a hill. It is more like a rope bridge over a scenic gorge, sturdy but swinging back and forth (with the changes and chances of this life), with precious little to hang on to except the stories you have heard about Jesus. But the bridge will hold if Jesus is who he says he is. Believing in him will not put us in charge or even save us from all harm. But by believing in him, we may gradually lose our fear, ...” and find His peace that passes all understanding amid the storms we face.”<sup>9</sup>

Jairus followed Jesus, not knowing where the journey would take him. In the Old Testament, Abraham was the first model of such faith, for he left familiar surroundings and went where God led him, even though it took him to unchartered territory. Such faith is not self-reliant but God-reliant, where both Jairus and Abraham trusted in “the word of faith”<sup>10</sup> proclaimed to them.

These stories, put together, show us what a walk of faith looks like, and they do not shy away from depicting the difficulties faced along the way. Their stories were recorded so we, too, can follow their example and experience a life of hope and peace.

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- If these two stories are living illustrations of what faith looks and feels like in action, then what are we meant to learn from them?
- What “crowd” have you had to press through in your own life to express faith and pray with confidence?
- In your own life, how have you dealt with feelings of unworthiness when approaching God with a need?
- Like Jairus, when did expressing faith in God seem hopeless?

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<sup>9</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, p. 94)

<sup>10</sup> Romans 10:10:8 “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is the word of faith that we proclaim.”