

Today's gospel is what is known by a very technical term: a Marcan sandwich; he sandwiches two stories together. Mark does this a lot in his gospel in order to highlight similarities or differences between two separate events and what they can teach us. I will point out a few things in the gospel but first we have to look at the first reading.

The Book of Wisdom tells us “ God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.” How did death enter the world if God did not make it? Once again, it's back to the Garden of Eden. The serpent said to Eve: “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden’?” The woman answered the serpent: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.’” But the snake said to the woman: “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.” Eve ate the fruit and gave it to Adam who also ate it. They did not physically die at that time, but they cut themselves off from God and were deprived of his friendship. Labor—which was supposed to be a joyful participation in God's work of creation—became toil and we became subject to illness and violence and all other forms of evil, including death. God responded to the Fall by announcing he had a rescue plan, that he was sending someone to crush the head of the serpent.

This connects to the gospel in two ways. First, Jesus cured the woman of her bleeding which was destroying her life and was actually slowly killing her. Then he cured Jairus' daughter who actually was dead. She had died while Jesus was taking care of the woman. Jesus said she was only sleeping, but that is because, for Him death is as impermanent as sleeping. Further proof that the girl was dead is that when Jesus woke her up, the Greek word Mark used—“egeire/arise”—is the same word Mark used for resurrection. These two accounts show us that Jesus is the serpent crusher, the promised one who has mastery over illness and death.

The gospel also offers a commentary on what went wrong in the Garden. How did the serpent—the devil in disguise—trick Eve? He caused her to doubt God: “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods.” The implication is that Eve couldn't trust God and she and Adam lost their faith. How does Jesus correct this in the Gospel? He said to the woman, “Daughter, your faith has saved you.” To Jairus and his wife he says: “Do not be afraid; just have faith.” Jesus is telling us that faith in Him will save us. He is also teaching us that we do not need to be afraid of illness and death. We shouldn't seek death, but we don't need to fear it. Jesus has already conquered death and it no longer has permanent power over us. Do not be afraid. Just have faith.

If you are going through a bad time and someone comes up to you and says, “Just have faith,” doesn’t it make you want to punch that person? I want to punch them. It’s easy for them to say, they aren’t the ones going through it. Our resistance to “just having faith” comes from the devil continuing to whisper in our ears that we cannot trust God. The devil also likes to tell us that we deserve bad things or that we are so bad that God can’t possibly love us. The devil is a liar and when he starts whispering his lies in our ears we need to tell him to go back to where he belongs. The devil doesn’t want us to see God as he really is...which is, as John tells us, God is love and God wants a relationship with us.

Did you notice how Jesus responded to the woman after she touched his clothes? He wanted to know who touched him. She thought, perhaps, that it was because she was going to be reprimanded. No. Instead, Jesus called her “Daughter.” She was not some random stranger in the crowd. She was family and he wanted her to know she was family. and that is how he sees each one of us: as beloved sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters.

Jesus wants a personal encounter with us so that he can show us how much he loves us and so that he can teach us that we can have complete faith in him. Every time we receive the Eucharist, it is as close an encounter as we can possibly have with him because we are receiving his Body and Blood. But even outside of the Eucharist, Jesus wants us to know he is with us because he wants to raise us up out of our anxiety, fear, and despair. He is our brother and our friend and even when we can’t come to him in the Eucharist, we can always come to him in prayer. There is an old southern gospel song written by a baptist pastor named Cleavant Derricks which I think expresses this very well and I am going to end by quoting a couple of verses from it.

“I once was lost in sin but Jesus took me in And then a little light from heaven filled my soul. He bathed my heart in love and He wrote my name above And just a little talk with Jesus makes me whole. I may have doubts and fears, My eyes be filled with tears, But Jesus is a friend who watches day and night. I go to him in prayer, He knows my every care And just a little talk with Jesus makes it right. Now let us have a little talk with Jesus. Let us tell Him all about our troubles; He will hear our faintest cry, And He will answer by and by. And when you feel a little prayer wheel turnin', you will know a little fire is burnin', and you’ll find a little talk with Jesus makes it right.” Do not be afraid. Have faith. And just a little talk with Jesus will make it right.