



From Manure to Miracles

Mark 5:21-42

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I was literally just thinking about how I was nervous about having to move this music stand because Scott always makes it so easy, but I knew for sure that I would mess it up somehow. So thanks Anthony. For those of you who don't know who I am, my name is Shaniah Peterson and I am the middle school director here. And that means I have the privilege of working with our students and I love my job. It is so, so fun. And I'm really excited and grateful to get to dive into God's word together this morning. But first, I think you should know a little bit about me, right? You don't want to just listen to me talk for 20 minutes without knowing a thing about me. That'd be kind of weird, right? First I said yes to Jesus when I was 13 years old at a summer camp that my friend invited me to, and I've been saying yes most days since.

You too? Good. I'm glad. And this is now my shameless plug to invite any and all incoming 6th through 12th graders to summer camp. Summer camp, there's no other place like it in terms of getting closer to your friends and to Jesus and your leaders and making new friends. And even if you don't have many friends at this church yet, this is the best way to make them. So if you know a student who's maybe a little hesitant, invite them and they can talk to me and I can tell them all about my first experience at summer camp where I knew one person and it was a great time.

Some other things about me, I'm an avid reader. I like to read some pretty trash books. I'm a delusional Seattle Mariners fan and I go to probably too many concerts. I'm also learning to crochet, which Anthony likes to make fun of me for at our staff meetings. Most importantly, I love Jesus. I love people and I love getting to talk to people about who Jesus is, whether that's in here, in this room or online. I'm so excited to get to be preaching to you this morning. Last Sunday, Pastor Scott talked about three tools. We need to be good soft soil for the seeds that God is sowing in us. First, we need a farmer. That's Jesus. We need to plow to loosen up all the hard soil and all the junk that we have in us. And finally, we need manure to create nutrient dense, more fertile soil. Just a reminder, the farmer doesn't make manure happen. It just happens.

As I was preparing this week, one of my friends on staff was telling me about how she loved my title. She is a farmer's granddaughter and she's a gardener herself, and she said over and over to me, "Shania manure is gold." I love your title, Manure is gold. And I was really having a hard time trying to figure out how golden it was considering that I have whatever the opposite of a green thumb is, maybe, what do they call it? A black thumb. I don't know, but I make all the plants die. It's not a good time. I can keep humans alive. Don't worry about that. Plants, absolutely not. And so as a non-gardener, manure is just manure. Sure, logically I know it helps the soil, it helps the plants grow with more nutrients and all that jazz. But I don't spend much of my time thinking about how to use it, how it will help my crops grow because I don't look at life through that lens, but the farmer does.

So as a non-farm, I trust the farmers to know what to do with the manure and how to use it to best grow thriving crops. The passage we're going to dive into today is all about manure and how Jesus can use it to perform miracles. Mark 5 holds one of my favorite stories in the Bible, but first let me set the scene. In Mark 1-5.5, Jesus did a lot of healing, casting out of demons and told a bunch of parables about faith. Immediately before this story, he had cast out a legion of demons and the whole town was terrified and asked him to leave. So he did, and that's where we start.

Verse 21 says, "When Jesus had again crossed over by a boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders named Jairus came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him. My little daughter is dying, please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him. Jairus is a synagogue leader and would've been on a similar social level with Jesus who was viewed as a teacher or a rabbi. So it wouldn't have been super unusual for Jairus to ask this favor of Jesus.

Verse 24, we continue. "A large crowd followed and pressed around him and a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had. Yet instead of getting better, she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak because she thought, if I just touch his clothes, I will be healed. Immediately, her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering."

This woman would've been a social outcast in more ways than one. First, she was a woman. Women in this culture were unable to own property except through a male relative. Their testimony in religious court was inadmissible and generally they were always under the authority or care of a male family member, whether that was a father, a brother, or a husband. Secondly, she was ritually or ceremonially unclean. According to Levitical law, because of her bleeding, she was unable to experience physical touch from relatives and anything she touched would be considered ritually unclean as well. This woman heard about Jesus and thought that if she just touched his clothes that she would be healed, which is exactly what happened. How many of our first thoughts whenever we're experiencing a manure like situation is if only I could just get close enough to Jesus or the first thing I should do is talk to God about this. To be quite honest, it is not normally

my first response. My first response is typically to wallow in a little bit of self-pity, complain a lot, maybe go on a mad girl walk.

And the thing is that I know who Jesus is. I've been following Jesus for the last 12 years, give or take, some days, right? And this woman was acting in blind faith, which is extremely inspiring to me. In verse 30, we see that at once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "And yet you ask who touched me?" The disciples are like, hello, Jesus. There's a huge crowd and you're asking who touched you? Seems a little silly. This is like if I was walking on the concourse at T-Mobile park during a sold out game and one of my friends asked who bumped into them? I would probably respond in a similar way to the disciples, "dude, can't you see that we're like in a sold out crowd? You're really asking who touched you? We're a sold out crowd."

And so we see that Jesus in verse 32 just keeps looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." The woman fell at his feet trembling with fear and still told the truth. And Jesus meets her with such kindness, grace, and gentleness. He calls her his daughter and tells her that her faith has healed her. This is significant.

It seems as if she was familiar with the religious laws about rituals and ceremonial impurity and cleanliness that I alluded to earlier. Leviticus 15:25-28 says, "When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her monthly period, she'll be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean as is her bed during her monthly period. And anything she sits on will be unclean as during her period. Anyone who touches them will be unclean. They must wash their clothes and bathe with water and they will be unclean until evening. When she's cleansed from her discharge, she must count off seven days and after that she'll be ceremonially clean."

Ceremonial impurity was not a sin. There were steps to becoming ritually or socially or ceremonially clean again, usually washing of water, time separated from society and then maybe a sacrifice or two. But none of these things were mentioned after the woman touches Jesus. Jesus tells her to go in peace and that she has been healed. According to Leviticus, Jesus should also be considered impure because he was touched by the woman. So he would've needed to wash his clothes, wash himself and not touch anyone or anything for the rest of the day. But that isn't what we see happening here. It's obvious that there is something different about Jesus.

In verse 35, we continue. "While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. They said, your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher anymore? Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, don't be afraid. Just believe." He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John, the brother of James. And when they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a

commotion with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all of this commotion and wailing?" Seems like a silly question to me.

And he says, "The child is not dead but asleep." So naturally, they all laugh at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him and went in where the child was. These messages from Jairus's house basically tell him not to bother bringing Jesus. Like, "Don't bother him, don't waste his time."

But Jesus responds in a way that doesn't really make any sense, which happens a lot in scripture. He ignores the messengers, instructs Jairus not to be afraid but to believe, and then they go to his house. Then he tells those that we're crying and grieving, "Why are you crying?" And that she's not dead, only sleeping. And when they laugh, to be fair, I get it. When you lose somebody and you're experiencing grief, no one is their best selves. But Jesus sends everyone away except her parents and his three disciples, Peter, James, and John. These three disciples are a part of Jesus's inner inner circle, like besties for the resties kind of like inner, inner circle. And later what we'll see is that they will travel up a mountain with him and they will witness the transfiguration. Where they see Jesus turn into who he truly is and then back into who he is at that moment. And that's like a big, big thing that happens, but this is one of the first inner, inner circle things that they get to experience with Jesus.

In verse 41, we see Jesus took the little girl by the hand and said to her to "Talitha koum," which means little girl, I say to you, get up. Immediately, the girl stood up, began to walk around. She was 12 years old. At this, they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this and to give her something to eat. He took the dead child's hand and said, "Talitha koum." A phrase and Aramaic, which was Jesus' language. Mark is sure to translate it because his audience would've been primarily Roman. And so he wanted to make sure that they didn't think that Jesus cast some sort of spell or muttered an incantation or anything like that. He wanted to separate this from the power of God versus magic. And the girl listens. At this point, we learned that she's 12, the same amount of time that the woman had been bleeding and everyone was shocked.

I would be too. I'd be very shocked if a dead child got up and started walking around. Be a little concerning for me. But Jesus tells them not to tell anyone and to feed her. And whenever Jesus tells someone not to share a miracle that he performs, it always strikes me as odd. But that's a theme that marks the first couple chapters of the gospel according to Mark, is Jesus hiding his true identity so that it comes out later in the story. Jesus taking the dead daughter's hand is in conflict with another one of the religious purity laws.

The Israelites receive these instructions and numbers When God tells Moses how to prepare oneself to enter the tabernacle or the tent of meeting where God's presence was housed in the Ark of the Covenant, so they keep it holy. These laws were translated into Hebrew culture. Once they settled in the promised land as well, they didn't just go away. They didn't become obsolete. In Numbers 19, which by the way, Numbers is not a boring book. I said it. I think you should read it. It's not boring. Neither is Deuteronomy. Read it for yourself.

Numbers 19:11-15 says, "Whoever touches a human corpse will be unclean for seven days. They must purify themselves with water on the third day and on the seventh day,

then they will be clean. But if they do not purify themselves on the third and seventh days, they will not be clean. If they fail to purify themselves after touching a human corpse, they defile the Lord's tabernacle. They must be cut off from Israel because the water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on them. They're unclean. Their uncleanness remains on them. This is the law that applies when a person dies in a tent. Anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in it will be unclean for seven days. And every open container without a lid fastened on it will be unclean."

Everyone that was in the house when the girl died is unclean for seven days, but Jesus is especially unclean because he held her hand. And he would've had different steps to reach ritual or ceremonial purity again, because he had touched her. He wasn't just in the same building. If he doesn't according to Numbers, he defiles the tabernacle and should be cut off from Israel. Again, we don't see any mention of that happening in any of the accounts of this story. It seems that in these instances that Jesus himself imparts his cleanliness to the two who would be considered impure. This might be because Jesus is the living tabernacle, the incarnation, the place where God and humanity meet. Jesus' victory over sin and death, he accomplished on the cross through the resurrection means that we are no longer bound by the ceremonial and laws of purity and impurity.

Jesus was the sacrifice of all sacrifices, and he imparts his purity on us. We are the tabernacle. We are now the place where God and humanity meet, because we have the Holy Spirit. And so Jesus takes these two stories and takes them from heaped manure and fashions miracles out of them. And neither party did anything to deserve these miracles, but the thing that they have in common is their faith. Now, let's get one thing clear. I'm not saying that in order for all of your manure to be turned into miracles, all you have to do is believe and pray harder and be ritually pure and all will be well. This is not the polar express. You aren't missing the ringing bells.

You haven't missed a train. This is not the health and wealth gospel, okay? But we often spend a lot of our time thinking about the manure and not a lot of time thinking about the miracles that have already happened or the miracles happening all around us. 2020 was my year of pile after pile after pile of manure. My church that had been in my home for almost a decade had three different scandals that kind of tore it apart and made my safe place feel unsafe. A pandemic increased the divide in an already polarized world where everyone was right and everyone was wrong. I also lived with a person that was more at risk for COVID and that made my life really scary as well.

I was searching for medical answers and I was finally diagnosed with a chronic illness called celiac disease. I'm okay, I just can't have gluten for the rest of my life, which means my life has a little less joy than the rest of yours. And I was working in a toxic work environment, but then I got a new job. Hooray. It wasn't this one. Wait, there's more. A week after I started at that job, my boyfriend of two years broke up with me. And I was so convinced that I was going to marry this man a newsflash, it didn't happen. So I was sad, angry, sick, and alone. Then a small miracle happened. I was meeting with a woman who was discipling me in her car while her daughter was at soccer practice. It was super glamorous. It was dark outside. It was raining. The outside matched the inside of me, and I was crying to her about how I didn't know what to do anymore.

My whole life was a mess because all my friends had gone to college, gotten married, moved out of state. She told me that I would be friends with this girl named Brie. And Brie is a girl who I had been serving with in our student ministry for years, but had never really put the effort into getting to know. I asked Brie to get smoothies with me the following Sunday, and we've been best friends ever since. Now we're roommates and coworkers too. After that, I found a counselor and I started unpacking years of piled up rotten, forgotten manure. Then I started working here at [inaudible 00:19:53] about three years ago, and that helped heal my mind and heart toward the church and church leadership. I could have spent the entirety of 2021 focused on all of the piles of manure from 2020, but I would've missed out on the miracles God was doing and trust me, I spent plenty of time in 2021 focused on the manure.

But now I had a best friend, a counselor, a new faith community to remind me of all the miracles that were unfolding and the fruit that was coming out of this rich nutrient dense soil that the manure had helped fortify. One of my favorite artists, Kings Kaleidoscope, has a song called The Beauty Between, where Chad Gardner sings, I couldn't wait for the summer, but now I'm missing the spring, and I exhausted the winter craving what it couldn't bring. When the sky is falling, when life is a dream, I fortunately fall into the beauty between. And this reminds me of Ecclesiastes, where the ancient teacher reminds us that there is a time for everything for summer, winter, springtime, and harvest and everything in between. So this week there are two action steps. Number one, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the farmer's lens. Ask yourself these questions. When has God turned your manure into rich soil that eventually beared fruit? And what manure is God, the farmer working with right now?

He is the farmer. And number two, look for the beauty between the manure and the fruit. There's a couple I know who have a five-year-old and a three-year-old son. They had ordered worms for their raised bed garden in their backyard so that the worms would help the plants grow. Remember, I have whatever the opposite of green thumb is, so let's move past that. Their three-year-old was so excited about the garden. He was most excited about the worms. He would say goodnight to them. He would say good morning to them. He wanted to bring them into the house. He was so invested in this garden and they hadn't even planted anything yet. He found the beauty between. As grownups, we can get so caught up in the destination that we forget to find the beautiful things along the journey or in the in-between. Currently, I'm in a season of in-between. I really want to have a family and to be a mom.

It's my biggest dream. Right now however, God has me in a season where I'm surrounded by really, really, really great friendships. I could look at all this as one huge pile of manure, and sometimes that is all I see. But right now I have the opportunity to practice this, to ask God to give me his lens. To ask God to show me the beauty that is between where I am now and where I want to be. So remember, and I'm going to be reminding myself of this, that manure is gold.

Jesus, I thank you that you are the farmer and that I'm not. I thank you for your word and that you are the one that is turning plants and fruit out of these piles of manure. And God, would you show us the beauty that is between? Would you give us a mindset that is like yours, and would we have eyes to see all of the beautiful things you have for us? And if I

said anything that goes against you or your word, remove it from our brains. In Jesus' name, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Think of some "manure" in your life right now, what is one way you need God to change your perspective on it?
- Look at Leviticus 15:25-30 and Numbers 19:11-15, what do you make of Jesus "breaking" or disregarding these laws in Mark 5:21-42?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.