

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF AN EPISODE: MARK 5:21-43

Following the method of David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Second Edition, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 154-59.

1. Getting to know the episode

Read Mk 5:21-43 silently or together.

2. Noticing the Narrator

- The narrator guides by the *sandwich* method; Jairus – Woman - Jairus; one episode is to be seen in light of the other
- The narrator presents a situation of *desperation and compassion*. Notice that the narrator does not *say* people are desperate, but *shows* their desperation. They beg for healing in the face of death and suffering. Again the narrator does not *say* Jesus is compassionate, but *shows* that Jesus is compassionate by healing them
- The narrator shares *privileged information* with the reader; Jairus is a leader of the synagogue, the woman has suffered with hemorrhaging for 12 years; her physicians have made her condition worse; Jesus knows he has been touched; the little girl is 12 years old
- The narrator uses *tactile language*. The narrator uses “touching” (*hapsomai*) four times (Mk 5:27, 28, 30, 31), putting hands on someone twice (Mk 5:23, 41), the crowd “presses against” Jesus twice (*sunthlibo*) (Mk 5:24, 31; the only two occurrences in Mark). Jesus heals by physical contact.
- Guides reader’s attitudes by *showing how people should respond to Jesus*. Both Jairus (5:22-23) and the woman (5:27-28) take the initiative to seek Jesus and both are rewarded (5:34, 42). The woman is said to have faith and is healed (Mk 5:34) and the belief of Jairus is implied and his daughter is healed (Mk 5:36). In contrast, the mourners are skeptical and mock Jesus; they are put out (Mk 5:40)

3. The points of view of different characters

Choose a character in the episode and retell the story from that character’s point of view.

The story as told by Jairus: After Jesus crossed the sea, I saw a great crowd gather around him. I heard that he was a healer and I needed to him to heal my daughter, who was dying. I was afraid the crowd might prevent me from reaching him. But I plowed through and I fell at his feet and begged him to come and lay hands on my daughter. With all the other people surrounding him, I was so grateful that he decided to come and see my daughter.

As we walked, the crowd pressed in on us. I grew more and more anxious that we would not reach my daughter in time. At one point, a woman grabbed him and he stopped. I wanted to urge him on. But Jesus turned around and spoke to the woman and said she was healed. As he was talking to her, my worst fears were realized. My friends came and told me my daughter had died. I was gripped with shock and terrible distress. But Jesus said, “Do not fear, only believe.” I didn’t know what to think.

When we got the house, people were already wailing outside because they said she was dead. However, Jesus said, “The child is not dead, but sleeping.” Then the mourners mocked Jesus and their make-believe cries became laughter. Jesus put them out. Then he took only three disciples, my wife and me into my daughter’s room. Jesus didn’t do anything special. No incantations. No magic words. No special potions. He just took my daughter by the hand and told her to rise up. She arose and walked. I was happy beyond description. But Jesus told us not to say anything.

4. Identifying stylistic features

Identify rhetorical features you see in the episode. How does the awareness of a particular stylistic device enable you to understand the characters, conflicts, and settings? What effect does the use of this stylistic technique have on the reader?

Explanations: The narrator makes two explanations (*gar-clauses*). The findings do not seem to be significant for this passage.

(a) First, the narrator explains why the woman wanted to touch him in Mk 5:28: “for she said, ‘If I but I touch his clothes, I will be made well’.”

(b) Second, the narrator explains the use of the term *korasion*, which refers to a girl about the age of puberty, in Mk 5:42: “for she was twelve years of age.”

Sandwich Structure

One of the most important rhetorical features of Mark 5:23-43 is the intercalation or sandwiching of one episode within another. It suggests one episode reinforces the themes, attitudes, and values of the other:

A Jairus’ daughter (Mk 5:23-24)

B Women with flow of blood (Mk 5:25-34)

A Jairus’ daughter (Mk 5:35-43)

Parallel wording: That the two episodes should be read together is reinforced by the narrator's uses the same or similar words in the two different episodes of healing:

	The woman (Mk 5:25-34)	Jairus' Daughter (5:23-24, 35-43)
Daughter	Mk 5:34 Jesus calls the woman " <u>Daughter</u> [<i>thugatēr</i>]"	Mk 5:23 Jairus' little girl is called " <u>daughter</u> [<i>thugatēr</i>]"
Twelve	Mk 5:25 She had been suffering for <u>twelve</u> [<i>dōdeka</i>] years.	Mk 5:42 She was <u>twelve</u> [<i>dōdeka</i>] years old.
Fell down	Mk 5:33 The woman " <u>fell down</u> [<i>prospiptō</i>] before him."	Mk 5:22 Jairus " <u>fell</u> [<i>piptō</i>] at his feet."
Touched/hand	Mk 5:27 The woman "touched [<i>haptomai</i>] his cloak." Mk 5:28 The woman said, "If I but <u>touch</u> [<i>haptomai</i>] his clothes." Mk 5:30 Jesus said, "Who <u>touched</u> [<i>haptomai</i>] me." Mk 5:31 The disciples ask how can Jesus say, "Who <u>touched</u> [<i>haptomai</i>] me?"	Mk 5:23 Jairus said, "Come and <u>lay out</u> <u>hands</u> [<i>epithēs tas cheiras</i>] on her ..." Mk 5:41 Jesus "took her <u>by the hand</u> [<i>tēs cheiros</i>] ..."
Immediate healing	Mk 5:29 <u>Immediately</u> her hemorrhage stopped ...	Mk 5:42 <u>Immediately</u> the girl got up ...
Saved/made well	Mk 5:28 "for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be <u>made well</u> [<i>sōdzō</i>]." Mk 5:29 "And immediately the flow of blood was stopped and she knew she <u>was healed</u> [<i>iatai</i>] of her disease." Mk 5:34 "He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has <u>made you well</u> [<i>sōdzō</i>]." Mk 5:34: "... go in peace and be <u>made well</u> [<i>hugiēs</i>] from your disease."	Mk 5:23 "Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be <u>made well</u> [<i>sōdzō</i>], and live"
Faith/believe	Mk 5:34 "Daughter, your <u>faith</u> [<i>pistis</i>] has saved you; depart in peace and be healed from your disease."	Mk 5:36 "Do not fear, only <u>believe</u> [<i>pisteō</i>]"
Jesus' command	Mk 5:34 <u>be healed</u> [<i>isthi hugiēs</i>]	Mk 5:41 <u>get up</u> [<i>egeirō</i>]

Retrospection and Foreshadowing:

(a) The theme of Jesus' compassion and **healing touch** **looks back** to Jesus' healing of a leper (Mk 1:41) and to "all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him" (Mk 3:10). It also **looks forward** to Jesus' healing touch of a deaf man (Mk 7:33), a blind man (8:22), the boy with the unclean spirit (Mk 9:27) and little children (Mk 10:13).

(b) Jesus' **command** the woman, "Go in peace and be made well" (Mk 5:34) **looks back** to Jesus' command to the former paralytic, "Go home" (Mk 2:11) and to the formerly demon possessed man, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you" (Mk 5:19). It also **foreshadows** Jesus' command to the rich man, "Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and then you will have treasure in heaven" (Mk 10:21) and to Bartimaeus, "Go; your faith has made you well" (Mk 10:52).

(c) Jesus' **command** to the little girl, "Arise [*egeirō*]" (Mk 5:41), **looks back** to Jesus' command to the healed paralytic to "Arise [*egeirō*], take your mat and go to your home" (Mk 2:11). It **anticipates** the command to Bartimaeus, "Arise [*egeirō*], he is calling you" (Mk 10:49).

(d) The **raising up** [*anistēmī*] of the little girl (Mk 5:42) **foreshadows** Jesus' three-fold prediction that the son of man will be raised up [*anistēmī*] after death (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; cf. 9:9) and the raising [*anistēmī*] of the dead (Mk 12:26).

(e) The link between faith/belief and being saved/made well—"Daughter, your faith [*pistis*] has saved you" (Mk 5:34) and "Do not fear, only believe [*pistueō*]" (Mk 5:36)—**looks back** to Jesus' main message, "Turn around and believe [*pistueō*]" (Mk 1:15). It also **foreshadows** Jesus' promise, "All things can be done for the one who believes [*pistueō*]" (Mk 9:23), **anticipates** the cry of the desperate father of the boy with the unclean spirit, "I believe [*pistueō*]; help my unbelief [*apistia*]" (Mk 9:24), and **looks forward** to Jesus' promise that "whatever you ask for in prayer, believe [*pistueō*] that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mk 11:24).

(f) The link between fear and experiencing divine power—"the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear [*phobeomai*] and trembling" (Mk 5:33)—**looks back** to the fear of the disciples after Jesus calmed the storm (Mk 4:41) and the fear of the people after legion was cast out (Mk 5:15). It also **foreshadows** the fear of the disciples after Jesus walks on water (Mk 6:50) and the fear of the women after they discover the empty tomb (16:8).

Awareness of stylistic device enables understanding: The reader is invited to interpret one story in light of the other, which is suggested by identical use of terms (*daughter, twelve, falling down, touched, faith, and made well*) and by similar events (a need is described, a person comes to Jesus, s/he falls at Jesus' feet, Jesus announces that faith is important, and someone is healed of a life threatening problem).

In both episodes, *Jesus' character is depicted*. Jesus has awareness of the problems beyond that of other characters. In one instance, Jesus knows that power has gone forth from him; in the other, Jesus knows the child is not dead. In both episodes, Jesus not only wants to heal and restore people, but he does. In this way, Jesus is presented as aware of human suffering, compassionate, and capable of bringing life out of death threatening situations.

In both episodes, *proper response to Jesus is depicted*. Jairus and the woman have urgent needs. Both initiate coming to Jesus. Both push through the crowds. Both are unconcerned about their own dignity and fall at Jesus' feet and beg him. Both are presented as examples of faith. However, there are interesting differences. In one instance, the woman is healed and then Jesus announces that her faith has saved her. In contrast, Jairus is first told to have faith and then healing happens. Again, in one instance, Jesus heals the one having faith (the woman) and in the other Jesus heals someone incapable of having faith (the comatose girl).

Effect of stylistic technique on reader: The reader is invited to trust Jesus and put confidence in his capacity to know, care about, and address our needs. The reader is invited to take the initiative, even beg for healing, and have faith. The reader is even encouraged to see that the faith of one person "covers" for someone who does not or cannot put faith in Jesus.

5. Questions about settings

Address issues of time, place, cultural milieu, emotional atmosphere, associations with Israel's history, how the setting relates to conflicts and problems in the episode, and what the setting reveals about the characters and overall structure of the Gospel.

Historical setting: There may be an allusion to a *historical setting*. Referring to the two females as "daughters" may invite the original readers think about two characters as *representative figures* for "the daughters of Israel" (cf. Deut 23:17; Jud 11:40; 2 Sam 1:24; etc.). The woman and the little girl represent women of Israel, or even Israel as a whole. Just as they have been suffering and are near death, so has Israel been suffering and near death under the rule of the Persians, Greeks, Selucides, and now the Romans. Who will restore them?

Cultural/religious setting: A cultural or religious *issue of purity* plays a role here. People like the woman, who had emissions of bodily fluids, were considered impure and therefore unable to have access to God through the temple system. The woman was outcast and marginalized because of her impurity. She was permanently prevented from coming to the temple. But she comes to Jesus and Jesus becomes the conduit of divine grace. In contrast, Jairus was at the other end of the purity spectrum. He was a male and a leader of the synagogue, and thus was considered closer to the center of power, purity, and God.

Public/private setting: The *private setting* for the healing of the little girl is revelatory setting. Mark makes a distinction between public and private settings. In public settings, Jesus interacts with the authorities and crowds, opposition is triggered, a lack of understanding prevails, and Jesus' identity remains a mystery. In private settings, Mark shows Jesus teaching the disciples and some understanding of Jesus' identity becomes revealed. Thus, when Jesus, the three disciples, and the mother and father go into the little girl's room, away from the public, it is a revelatory moment. Jesus' identity is being disclosed.

6. Tracing the story

Skipped.

7. Analysis of conflicts

Identify some of the conflicts in the episode (inner, between characters, within nature, society or authorities, supernatural beings). Trace one of the conflicts in terms of the source, who initiates it, how it escalates, and is resolved (or not resolved). State in one sentence what is at stake in the conflict.

Inner conflict: Both Jairus and the women experience *inner conflict*; there is illness and suffering where they desire healing and restoration. The resolution of the conflict drives them to seek Jesus. The woman also shows inner conflict; she is bold enough to touch Jesus, but she is also fearful and trembling after the healing occurs. She touched One who was greater than she expected! Jairus is also fearful; the narrator does not show his fear, but has Jesus allude to it (Mk 5:36).

Conflict between: There is also *conflict between* characters. Jesus, and his self-understanding, is in conflict with the disciples, and their lack of comprehension about Jesus and what is able to know (cf. Mk 5:31). There is also conflict between Jesus and the mourners, who mock him (Mk 5:40). There is also an indirect conflict or sharp contrast between the women (who was impure and impotent) and Jairus, a male leader (who was pure and powerful).

What is at stake? What is at stake is not only whether Jesus can heal and alleviate suffering, but whether other characters (and the reader) will grasp the implications of Jesus' healing. Do they grasp who this is? Have they experienced the epiphany of Peter, James, and John who see the little girl arise? (cf. the epiphany in Mk 9:2-8)

8. Analysis of characters

Select a character. Note what the character says and does, what others say (including the narrator) about the character, and how the character interacts with others. Then identify the traits of the character. Consider what drives the character, what the characters' desire is, what are the beliefs and values of the character, what the place of the character is in the social order, whether the character changes or develops, and whether the character is illuminated by comparison or contrast with other characters.

See some of the comments above, which deal with some of these issues.

9. Identifying standards of judgment

What standards of judgment or norms (beliefs, attitudes, values, and actions) are used to evaluate the characters in this episode? How are they identified? Narrator's words? Jesus' words and actions? Scripture? Evaluate the characters in this narrative.

The standards of judgment: Includes coming to Jesus, taking the initiative to ask or beg Jesus, faith that Jesus can heal, not having fear, not doubting or mocking Jesus. They are identified by what things are described by the narrator and positively reinforced by Jesus words and action.

10. The rhetorical Impact: Then and now

How might this narrative affect the original hearers? Did it amaze, evoke faith, convict, expose hypocrisy, offer hope, impel to action, and so on? Are there any contemporary stories, films, or novels that might have similar impact?

It might have been written to people who were experiencing marginalization from observant Jews, heal problems, fear of persecution, and the absence of Jesus. The story points toward Jesus healing centered in faith, not direct encounter with Jesus. Both the woman and the little girl are healed before either one talk to Jesus face-to-face. The story was meant to evoke assertive faith, confident faith, even when there were detractors (mourners) and unbelievers (disciples).

11. Questions on the ethics of reading

1. What influence does this have on your values and beliefs?

Take the initiative. Recognize that fear, trembling, and unbelief reside with faith/believe, and that faithful action and a believing state of mind can happen even as one experiences contrary emotions and thoughts.

2. How has your particular place in your particular society shaped your understanding of this episode? Consider gender, education, place of origin, ethnic or racial identity, occupation, political party, family, economic level, etc.

3. How might your reading be enhanced or changed by reading with people from different places in society? How about people from different societies or cultures?

4. What do you resist about the values and beliefs of this episode? Why?

5. Could this episode have a negative affect on someone? How? What is your responsibility in such circumstances?

6. If you took the episode seriously, how might it change your life and commitments?