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Lectinary: Psalm 130, 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27, Mark 5:21-43

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is a Nigerian writer and public speaker known as a central figure in postcolonial literature and author of the award-winning novels *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*. In her Ted Talk, of July 2009 she explores "The Danger of a Single Story" and the negative influences that a "single story" can have in how we stereotype one another. Adichie argues that single stories originate from a lack of knowledge of others and festers into malicious intent to suppress other groups of people due to prejudice. Adichie believes that we all, especially in our childhood, are "impressionable and vulnerable" when it comes to single stories. Adichie also believes that Western media and literature often only tell one story, which causes people to generalize and make assumptions about groups of people.

She gives two primary examples of such generalizations. First, her college roommate had a "default position" of "well-meaning pity" towards her due to the misconception that everyone from Africa comes from a poor, struggling background (04:49). Adichie also clearly faults herself for also being influenced by the "single story" epidemic, showing that she made the same mistake as many others. Due to the strong media coverage on Mexican immigration she "had bought into the single story", automatically associating Mexicans with immigration (Adichie 08:53). These anecdotes emphasize how stereotypes are formed due to incomplete information, but one story should not define a group of people.¹

Adichie summarizes that "to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" (09:25). As a storyteller she responds to these misconceptions by emphasizing the importance of spreading diverse stories in opposition to focusing on just one. She professes that the rejection of the single story phenomenon allows one to "regain a kind of paradise" and see people as more than just one incomplete idea (Adichie 18:17).²

The Gospel of Mark is akin to story tellers like Adiche in which both Mark and Adiche use stylistic devices in their story telling. One in particular comes to mind, intercalation, or, to be less technical, the "sandwich" method of storytelling. Mark and Adiche both like to start telling one story, and then interrupt the first story and start telling a second story, and then inevitably will go back to finish the first. This forces the audience or reader to think about how the stories are related. In our Gospel lesson we have two female stories whose social positions are radically different but what they find in common is healing.

¹ Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story." TEDGlobal, TED, 23 July 2009, Oxford, UK. Transcript

² Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story." TEDGlobal, TED, 23 July 2009, Oxford, UK. Transcript.

The first story is about a twelve-year-old girl at the point of death, the daughter of Jairus, “one of the leaders of the synagogue.” Most likely, she is affluent, just on the edge of puberty.

In contrast, the second story is about a woman who suffered from hemorrhaging for twelve years, most likely permanently infertile. No doubt the number 12 for Mark symbolizes the key to the social meaning of how the stories are related. Seemingly, only when the outcast woman is restored to true “daughterhood” can the daughter of the synagogue be restored to true life. Palestine in the first century was not exceptional in terms of segregation based upon purity codes. Today, the global north and south are no less characterized by “purity codes,” although our Western societies often fail to acknowledge how our structures and belief systems create “insiders” and “outsiders”. For example, growing up in Raleigh, NC, my friends worried about “catching cooties”. No one knew quite what “cooties” were. It became obvious that it was the disadvantaged kids who had cooties. Even kids were constructing social hierarchies. The despised groups were described as “dirty.”

The New Testament scholar, Ched Meyers puts the cover up of purity laws this way, we “grant some people access to health care, education, housing, and food while others go without; and allow some to suffer while others prosper”.³ In many circumstances in human history, we hear stories about how the marginalized are forced to live alone and to become unapproachable and to be stigmatized as unclean.

The woman with a hemorrhage in Mark is not even give a name. Mark recounts having spent all her money on doctors, she is now destitute and rendered ritually unclean. She cannot a place of worship. Family and friends avoid touching her and anything associated with her. Just by being in the crowd, she violated all sorts of rules, taboos and even laws in first century Palestine.⁴ In regard to this woman approaching Jesus, it is hard to imagine a more marginalized person. Stepping out of the crowd is this woman’s tremendous act of faith. “Her movement alone is salvific without any need for mysterious power.”⁵ This unnamed woman steps out of the crowd and is named by Jesus.

In contrast, Jesus encounters the affluent and beloved daughter of a community leader. Jairus approaches Jesus from the front, pleading his request. The anonymous woman has to sneak up from the back, through the crowd. The unnamed woman gets healed first. Indeed, Jairus’ daughter seems lost in the story while Jesus renames the unclean woman. Here is the punch line for the sandwiched stories: while the little girl is Jairus’ daughter, Jesus identifies the unclean woman as Jesus’ “daughter.”

Jesus tells the woman as much: “Daughter, your faith has made you well” (v. 34). The story of Jairus and his daughter provide a start and finish within which the unnamed woman is given a name. The bleeding woman dismissed and despised, gets Jesus’ first attention and a welcome

³ Ched Myers, teamed with Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, and Stuart Taylor, “Say to This Mountain”: Mark’s Story of Discipleship, chapter 7, “The Priority and Power of the Poor.” pp. 66-67

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⁵ Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred*, pp. 94-95

into Jesus' family. The early theologian, John Chrysostom writes, "Do you see how the woman is superior to the ruler of the synagogue? She did not detain Him, she took no hold of Him; she just touched Him with the end of her fingers, and though she came later, she went away healed first."⁶

But with Jesus there is no zero-sum outcome. Jairus' daughter gets healed too. This is not a story about how the outsiders are rewarded and the insiders are punished. The last may come first and the first last, but the first are not excluded.

Zero sum outcomes are seen in corporations, one person's promotion means someone else is fired. In health care, caring for one often means neglecting another. It is characteristic of Jesus' iconoclasm of zero-sum idols that Jairus and his daughter have not lost just because the hemorrhaging woman won. Jesus' delay in moving toward Jairus' daughter does not make Jesus too late to save Jairus' daughter.

Jesus is about Non Zero Sum outcomes. We see this when Jesus promises that those who lose their lives for his sake will save them (Mark 8:35). Jesus tells Jairus' daughter to "get up" (egeire) and she "gets up" (anestē)—both verbs that Mark and the early church in general characteristically used for Jesus' resurrection.

Both stories are about being cured. The woman stops bleeding; Jairus' daughter gets up and walks about. But Mark's choice of words with connotations of resurrection invite us to think that in both instances this encounter with Jesus is deeper than what we see. The woman can now be human, can now worship God in community. The girl walks around which bodes well for a future movement. a hint that in the midst of that movement this girl may participate in the new kind of life that will be made known in Jesus' resurrection.

⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew* 31.2, trans. George Prevost (trans. altered), NPNF 1:10, 207.