

### Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him, and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged 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." So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you, how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace, and be healed of your disease." While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further? But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep?" The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.

### "Only Believe"

Jesus said to the leaders of the synagogue,  
"Do not fear, only believe."  
Mark 5:36

### There Is A Battle Of Two Wolves Inside Us All



One is evil. It is anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, lies, inferiority and ego.

The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy and truth.

The wolf that wins? The one you feed.

-Cherokee Proverb

The battle between the two wolves inside of me erupted unexpectedly last Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. The place? The office of my primary care physician. When did my evil and good wolves 'go to the mat?' (expression from the movie 'Godfather and You've Got Mail') Minutes after entering the examining room when I realized that my health needs were not going to get addressed in this long awaited for visit. Why? Apparently, it was my fault. When I made my appointment I did not specify that I wanted a 'physical' exam (which according to insurance speak means hands on touch) along with my follow-up check-up. What did I do? I put my arms across my chest and said to the assistant: "I am not leaving this office until I get the kind of annual physical that I came for!" Where in my body did the battle stress of my two wolves show up? In a blood pressure rise to 170 over 90! No surprise. So when the assistant asked: 'Why the rise?' . . . I lost it . . . and, with an angry voice that spoke of my desire to squeeze her neck until her eyes popped out. . . . I said: 'Because I'm upset about not getting my medical needs met! . . . As she hurried from the room I knew it

was time to start breathing my calming 'yogi' breath: to stop feeding the evil wolf of anger and inferiority inside of me. Why? So that, instead of losing faith in my physician, I would be able to co-operate with her in finding a way to receive help within the limits of our big business model, insurance managed system of health care.

The battle between the two wolves inside of me erupted suddenly and unexpectedly in that blood pressure rise, stressful encounter. 'Thanks to recent brain scan studies, neuroscientists have located specific areas in our brain in which the evil wolf of fear and anger originate: the amygdala and the thalamus. The amygdala governs our fight-or-flight response to a perceived or imagined fear. The thalamus attaches a sense of meaning and reality to the fear. Even if you are not a brain anatomy nerd it is easy to remember our internal place of fearful anger that overacts in the face of perceived but not actual life threatening situations (the crazy kind that causes others to wonder if you are nuts), because these two instinctual parts of our brain actually look like nuts: the almond and walnut' ("How God").

Thanks also go to brain imaging studies that show the good wolf part of our brain: the neo-cortex. 'It's the part of the human brain that stores the memories, beliefs, and behaviors learned over a lifetime as well as all our visual, auditory, motor, language, and cognitive processing centers of the brain' (from How God). In the neo-cortex there are two areas that are of special interest to us today. One is the anterior cingulate. In his book, "How God Changes Your Brain," neuroscientist Andrew Newberg notes: 'This area processes social awareness, intuition, and empathy. (Empathy in brain speak is understood as our neurological capacity to resonate to another person's emotions). 'The other is our parietal lobe. 'This area of brain gives us our sense of self in relation to other objects in the world. Neurological connections of compassion may be found here. 'Compassion goes a step further than empathy in its ability to respond to another person's pain.' It allows us to be more tolerant of others and more accepting of our own shortcomings and frailty These neurons that struggle to form co-operative alliances with others are newer (only been around for about 15 million years) and are vulnerable to the 'almonds' in our brain that have been happily generating fear for 450 million years' (from How God). Apparently, each

of us is still faced with the question: Which wolf inside of me wins? When fear fills our bones and compassion flees our heart, which wolf within wins? Sinner or saint?

I like the answer to the Cherokee proverb, 'The one we feed.' I like it for two reasons. First, neuroscience underscores the truth of this answer. Specifically, brain imaging shows that strong neuron connections in compassionate centers of our brain can disarm fear and anger in our instinctual brain. Furthermore, when this area decreases, we can feel at one with God, the universe, or any concept which we are consciously focusing on". Second, the answer, now informed by our brain science learning, makes us want to not only feed our compassion brain cells but to feed them with food that strengthens its 'plasticity' (neurons rearranging themselves and making new connections in order to see things from a different point of view and adapt to new situations). Brain scans now show that our best plasticity foods for the healing of the mind and creation of inner peace are the spiritual practices of contemplation, meditation, and prayer that are practiced long term and in a consciously focused way. Imaging research has shown that spiritual practices of this sort result in stronger brain cell infrastructure and deeper neural networks of compassionate response and enlightenment.

Compassion is a primary concept of faith that is found in every religious tradition that seeks sacred transformation of self and society. For Jairus (whose name in Greek means, 'he who is awakened or he is enlightened') it meant a deepening of faith in the life giving power of Jesus' God; and a deepening of trust in words from the mouth of compassionate healers. Jesus took Jairus' daughter by the hand and said: "Talitha cum" (which means little girl get up), and she got up. And to the woman who was sick and tired of being sick and tired, and who feared her twelve years of social isolation and blood loss would never end --but who was healed by the compassionate heart of a folk healer stopping to care for her at her point of need, Jesus said: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." As we meditate on their stories, may Jesus' words: "Do not fear, only believe" bring down our blood pressure and make us well.