

Sermon 27 June 2021

Mark 5.21-end: Jairus' daughter and the woman in the crowd.

Today's gospel is a delightful one. It is a message of hope to all who suffer.

It is also the only interrupted miracle within the gospel – so the raising of Jairus's daughter gets interrupted by the woman in the crowd. The posh term is an 'intercalation'. And we find nameless ill females interconnected by the number 12 (the dead child is aged 12 and the woman has been ill for 12 years). The young girl can be seen to represent the richer parts of society, the older woman the poorer. And Jesus shows availability to both.

The two previous miracles are the calming of the storm (4.35-41) and the exorcising of the Gerasene demoniac (5.1-20). It is followed by an account of Jesus returning to his hometown of Nazareth, and a description of how the disciples are to undertake mission.

So to focus on the woman in the crowd. We don't know much about her, some traditions name her Veronica (Lockyer 1965: 194), others Bernice (Levine 2001:74). Sometimes she is known as the woman with the haemorrhage', but although her illness debilitates her, she refuses to let it define her. She is simply a woman in the crowd whose chronic condition has bedevilled her for 12 years and she is worsening. The listeners would have known immediately that this meant she would be excluded from the worshipping life of the community.

It's interesting to reflect that because of the Law, everything she touched or sat on would have to be washed (Lev 15.25-27) – sound familiar? Hers would be a life without hugs or normal human contact – sound familiar?

Into this situation, the isolated, impoverished person reveals that she has heard the stories of Jesus. She believes that if she can just touch his clothes she will be healed. She jostles with the busy crowd to sneak up and touch Jesus. But of course, those laws mean that, like someone who's Covid positive, everyone she touches should then have to self-isolate. How much more this story means to us now than it would 2 years ago!

This intercalation of Jairus's daughter and the woman in the crowd show that where Jesus meets stealth, he is open, and where he meets desperation, Jesus is calm. And he does so at a time when he was probably so tired! He's just calmed the storm of last week and now there's the pressure of both these emergencies. Furthermore, some people suggest that this intercalation happens so that this woman (probably a gentile, certainly unclean) can act as a model of discipleship for Jairus.

And we don't get quite how radical the whole setting is here. Rabbi's were warned

repeatedly not to talk to a woman in public (cf. Epstein 1939:Berakot 34b). Jesus not only talks to her, he also draws her back into the heart of the community.

And a beautiful part of this story is that the woman approaches Jesus from behind. Not surprisingly given the Laws we considered above. Maybe some of us today, feel unable to walk up to Jesus face to face. Perhaps we feel more comfortable with the thought of approaching from behind. This story deepens Mark's portrayal of Jesus' healing.

And there are those, such as Hilary, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and Aquinas who invite us to see this story as an allegory. Perhaps the finest version of this is Augustine's sermon on Romans 9-11, where he suggests that the conversion of Jews and Gentiles is said to be prefigured in this passage from Mark. Where Jairus represents the Jewish people, and the woman in the crowd, the Gentiles. As Bede puts it:

In this reading the ruler of the synagogue begs for the salvation of his daughter, but while the Lord is coming to his house a woman who has a flow of blood catches his attention first and anticipates the healing [praeripit sanitatem]. Then the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue reaches the desired healing, being recalled indeed from death to life. In this reading the salvation of the human race is displayed, which was dispensed when the Lord came in the flesh in such a way that first some people out of Israel came to faith, then 'the full number of the Gentiles came in, and so all Israel might be saved' (Rom. 11.25-26). As for the ruler of the synagogue, and why he came to the Lord to ask on behalf of his daughter, who is he understood to be better than Moses himself? For this reason he is aptly named Jairus, i.e. one who enlightens, or who is enlightened [id est inluminans sive inluminatus], because he received words of life to give to us.

This story also is said by some to point us the cross and resurrection (Garland 2002). The Resurrection is the ultimate example of death being held at bay by faith, but this is a foretaste. The stigma she receives for the flow of blood points to the stigma Christ will soon bear. She is also a model for us of discipleship – showing persistence, risk-taking, confession and overcoming fear.

So what of this for us? We too come with our brokenness and wounds, maybe some of us even feel spiritually dead. For each of us, Jesus is here for us, offering us mercy, kindness and acceptance.

We are going to look at a picture now slide 13 - the miracle at Magdala at Galilee in the Duc in Altum Church

Reach out and touch the robe of Jesus today and ask for the reminder, the grace, and the knowing that comes from him. Let Christ find you wherever you are and meet you there—at your lowest lows and your highest heights. Remember that you too are the hands of Christ and have the ability to offer healing to those who are suffering. Ask for wisdom and pray for strength and courage this day.

May Christ's healing powers be yours today. And may you know yourself fully loved by God, whatever your past and your present. Your future with Jesus is open and each of us is invited into a dance of faith.

Amen.