

‘Healing and raising from the dead’

Mark 5:21–43

Today’s gospel reading contains a real sense of urgency. It speaks of two individuals, from opposite ends of the spectrum of the social scale in the society of the time. Firstly, very briefly, Jairus, an important, influential man and a leader in the synagogue. He comes to Jesus asking him to heal his daughter, who was at death’s door. They begin to make their way to his home in order that Jesus might heal the child. There is a sense of urgency as the huge crowd, pressing in on Jesus make their way to Jairus’ house.

Then, interrupting the story and, as it seems to me, interfering the flow of this wonderful story of the potential healing of this important man’s dying daughter, a second individual has an encounter with Jesus. She is an isolated and outcast person; a nameless, faceless person, known to us only by a kind of thumbnail sketch. We know just four things about her: we know that she’s been suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years; we know that she has gone to doctor after doctor looking for a cure; we know that, not only has she not been cured, she has grown worse; and we know that not only has she grown worse, she has spent all her money on this fruitless pursuit. No private health insurance back then! Everything she has is gone.

Those are the facts the gospel passage shares with us. But there are more things you should know about her. You have heard what the cost was to her medically, and financially. But there is another cost to her, a far greater cost, an enormous social and religious cost, as outlined in Leviticus. It is the cost of being ritually unclean for many, many years. A woman with a haemorrhage would be considered unclean—as would every bed she lay upon, every thing she touched, every person she touched.

Because of her physical condition, the prevailing religious laws of the day would demand that the woman be left completely alone. Cut off. Isolated. Outcast. Other people would know to avoid contact with her, to shun her presence. She has probably lost her family, and most

likely lives alone, so that no one else need be exposed to the risk of being, as she is, permanently ritually unclean.

We have encountered situations like this before in the gospel of Mark. Remember the man who had leprosy, who was every bit as outcast as this woman. You may remember that Jesus was moved with both compassion for that man's plight and anger at the injustice that excluded him from being a part of God's family.

There is one more thing you should know about the woman with the haemorrhage. She hasn't given up. She's a gutsy lady. She is still determined to find healing for herself.

So, here comes Jesus. He is in the midst of a great crowd. People are pressing in on him from every side. And he is hurrying, we must believe, with the aforementioned distraught (and very wealthy and powerful) man to the bedside of that man's daughter, who lies at the brink of death.

The nameless woman who has been suffering for twelve years gets the idea that if she can only touch Jesus' clothes, she will be healed. I have to confess that this sounds an awful lot like some sort of magical thinking, using Jesus as a sort of talisman. Yet we sometimes, even in this age, engage in that kind of behaviour, don't we? We have rituals, don't we? Like saying a prayer before taking a test or exam, or maybe wearing of lucky socks for the bowling tournament, or we think of brides wearing 'something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.' Human beings are often prone to impart quasi-magical powers to physical objects, whether we admit it or not: a rabbit's foot, a horseshoe, dare I say a St. Christopher medal.

She pushes through the crowd and touches Jesus' clothing. And sure enough, power flows from him. The Greek word for that power is *dynamis*, the same word from which we get dynamite. Explosive power! That dynamic power flows from Jesus, and he knows it, and he stops and looks around the crowd and says, "Who touched me?" Which elicits a response from the disciples along the lines of "You have got to be kidding! Look at the crowd. There were heaps of people close enough to touch him!"

The woman knows right away she has been healed. She can feel it in her body, just as Jesus felt that power had gone out from his. But Jesus is not willing to simply make someone well. Jesus is not willing to simply let the power flow out from him—good and dynamic and healing as that power might be. Jesus is not content to merely solve a problem. Jesus wants an encounter with that person.

And encounter her he does. What does he say to her? He says, “Daughter.” To the woman whose family has fled, he says, “Daughter.” To the woman who is alone, cut off, isolated, outcast, he says, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” And with those words, Jesus accomplishes this truly explosive healing: more than stopping the bleeding. He has restored her to community, to family. Someone who had been excluded, who had been languishing on the outside, for twelve long years, has a family once more, will be accepted, has been restored.

So it is for us. We, all of us want to be healed of all that causes us to suffer: illness, disease, pain. Of course we want the healing of our many varieties of heartbreak and loss, depression, grief. Recognising that healing comes in many guises, Jesus offers us healing, and much more. He offers us an open door into a world where people sit together and talk intimately, accept and understand each other. He offers us a world where people touch one another on the arm as they speak, where they embrace one another spontaneously when someone is sad, or glad, or relieved. A world where, together we learn and grow and discover and change. Jesus offers us community, the family of God.

The first followers of Jesus, the first Christian community gathered, firstly, around the preaching and healing Jesus, and then, around the risen Christ. It is the foundation of the beloved community. There is always room at the table. It is the foundation of the beloved community that no one is to be alone, cut off, isolated, or outcast. Each one of us is “daughter.” Each one is “son.” Each one is “sister,” or “brother.” Each one is “friend.” Each one is “beloved.” Each of us is kin to Jesus, who touches us with dynamic power and welcomes us in. Now, we are a pretty diverse family! All of us different, unique. But together we make up the family of Christ in this place. It would be my fervent prayer that together

we would continue to embrace the outcast, the isolated, those on the fringe, the refugee, the unlovable, the hurting, the leper, the bleeding...

I'd like to finish there, but I can't without getting back to poor old Jairus. After the miraculous healing of the un-named woman comes the news that Jairus' daughter has died. Jesus had been weigh laid; too bad about the little girl who had died. But Jesus insists that he continue nevertheless, people scoffing at his suggestion that the little one is merely sleeping. They know a dead person when they see one! And so we hear about Jesus' not curing the little girl, but raising her from death. Something even more miraculous than a simple cure! A happy ending!

The Lord be with you.

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1st July, 2012