

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup>. December 2017  
Third Sunday of Advent  
Mark 5 V 21 to 43.  
A dead child, and a sick woman.

Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of Christ. There is the birth of Christ all those years ago to think about. What it meant, what it offers, what response we have made to it. There is the daily coming of Christ to us in fellowship, and what that means and how we respond to it. Then, there is the future coming of Christ. The future coming will be unlike the first coming, because on that Day Christ will come as King with His mighty angels, and bring this age to an end. The Bible tells us that it is these events we should be concerned with more than the state of the pound, what Brexit could produce or even what may happen sooner or later in Korea!

While the three examples above are less important than what we do with the Incarnation, they are still of importance, and they should cause us to turn to prayer as never before.

The passage that we are considering today contains the intermingled stories of a distraught father's coming to beg Jesus to heal his little daughter who was at the point of death, and a sick woman. Perhaps there is no more anxious a relationship than a father about to lose a little daughter. He gains an audience with Jesus, and receives a positive response. I wonder how Jairus now felt. Did desperation turn to urgency? He had received the consent of Jesus to come and heal his daughter, but now did urgency set in? Would he be able to get Jesus through the crowd in time to reach his daughter before she died? The situation was still fraught with fear and anxiety and who knows what other desperate feelings the father was going through. He just had to get Jesus to his daughter as quickly as he could!

Then, all of a sudden Jesus stopped in His tracks. He turned about and asked the stupidest question Jairus had ever heard. 'Who touched me?' Even the disciples explained to Jesus what did He expect, He was surrounded by people all wanting to get near Him – for all those under 10 years old, it was the equivalent of all the people wanting to get a selfie with Jesus! What else could He expect, but that people would be jostling Him?

Then it gets worse. Jesus engages with a woman who has fallen at His feet and is telling Him the whole story of what has happened to her. Not a short version the Bible says, but the whole story! Mark tells us some of the details. Now the Gospel of Mark is a very short and snappy book. It flies over events that the other Gospel writers take much more time over, so when Mark tells us about a 12 year illness, many doctors, suffering at their hands, that she had spent all she had and was getting worse rather than better. When he records the thoughts of the lady, that she had thought that even if she could touch the hem of Jesus robe that she would be healed, we have to realise that this was a major story Jesus wanted to hear. It took time, and time was not something Jairus had much off!

In the meantime, Jairus is standing waiting, and with every new twist and turn of the woman's story another bit of him is dying and fear is rising. I cannot imagine the anguish he is going through and perhaps the hard thoughts that his mind is being tempted to think about Jesus. 'Doesn't He know how seriously ill my daughter is?' 'It's going to be too late!' Poor man. But Jesus, the Master and the Maker, is not unknowing nor uncaring, but able and willing to care for all.

God does not need to be in a rush anytime. Neither illness nor health, life nor death are as critical to God as they seem to be to us. He is the giver of life, the sustainer of health. He can restore and give life, or He can withhold it as He wills and in the wisdom and richness of His grace. However, only the eye of faith can see this, and that is why humanity lives under such stress. We seem more and more to live under increasing stress today. However, in a year, five years, ten years, one hundred years, nothing that we stressed out about today will even be a memory, never mind an issue. Most of what we are stressed out about are actually not worthy of our expended nervous energy. We need to have our spiritual eyes opened, to see dimly and in part, what God sees clearly and fully, and to live receiving God's peace that goes beyond our understanding.

Now this does not mean that anxiety of a kind that Jairus was feeling is wrong and unnatural. When the news comes that his daughter has died, Jesus tells him not to doubt, but to believe. The implication was that he was believing, but needed to continue to do so, even in the midst of sorrow and fears and doubts.

I don't want to say anything more at this time about the little girl – she was raised and made well, but there are so many other things that must be said about this miracle that will need to keep for another time.

Let's think a little about Jesus encounter with the sick woman. The poor soul had been ill for 12 years, she was chronically ill. Some of us have chronic conditions, so know something of the other things that come with it. There were physical consequences to her illness. Losing blood meant that she could have lacked breath, had chronic weakness and as such her activity would have suffered so leading to muscle loss and the increase of other disabling injuries. There were religious consequences to her illness. She would have been ceremonially unclean for these twelve years and as such not able to attend the Temple worship, or mix with the general public. She would not be able to call on friends at home, and would not dream of inviting anyone to her home because by doing so they would become unclean.

There were financial consequences to her illness. We are told that she had spent all her money on numerous doctors. She had suffered much at their hands. This could only mean a variety of diagnosis and treatments, many of which we would now consider barbaric. There were also social and psychological consequences to her chronic illness. She would have lost friends and perhaps been estranged from any family she may have had. She might have asked herself many times if this illness was her own fault. Was God punishing her for something she had done or not done? She had gone over this

many times, but could not think of one thing that deserved such a punishment, perhaps God just didn't like her! Perhaps she alternated between convincing herself that she was bad and so deserved this, and then feeling that she could not be so bad, and so this illness was so unfair! Then she ran out of money for more doctors. She was now alone with her illness and she realized that it was getting worse, and hopelessness and despair set in.

However, at the same time there was something working in her. She had heard about Jesus and the healings and the miracles He had done. Perhaps she had also heard about some of the people who Jesus had interacted with. They were not the great and the noble alone, but ordinary people and even well-known sinners, people with reputations, and she began to think.

When Jesus arrived back in her community, she did not have all that much time to act on her hopes. She had thought a lot about Jesus – by the way, this story is also a story about how the Holy Spirit creeps silently into some ones heart and works there undetected. The evidence of this is that even though many people in the crowd were touching Jesus, she was the only one who got what she got from a touch of His robe.

Despite how she was, the illness, weakness, social isolation, fear, she was growing in a naked faith. Take note of this, she did not want to come to Jesus and ask, she did not want Jesus to take time or give her attention, she had come to see that she needed to touch this man who was fully man and fully God and that all her future was tied up in this simple action. She saw that touching Christ Himself was what she needed and that the cure of every other need was contained in Him. The crowds were jostling Him because of His reputation, hoping to see Him do something great. This fearful, wonderful, doubting, heroic, trembling, faith-filled woman wanted to touch Jesus hem, she wanted Him and she got everything else in that touch. This un-named and fearful soul is such a hero. Her story is told in the Gospels because even though a person of low estate on earth, the desire of her heart to touch Jesus rang out like a bell in heaven. It was people like her that gave Jesus the joy He had in His earthly life, people who wanted to touch Him for Himself.

Jesus did not see her. He did not know that she was coming, but when she touched Him, heaven responded, and the power of God flowed out from Him, and He knew that someone had touched Him in faith. I don't believe that Jesus was put out by this. I think that He was thrilled and wanted to meet the person who had touched Him in a way that no-one else had been able to do. The angels rejoice when a soul is saved, and Jesus rejoices when someone touches Him in faith.

The text tells us of the conversation between the woman and Jesus. The story does not end there though. Jesus addresses the other broken parts of her life. He affirms her in her faith, He blesses her with peace, and He commands that there is freedom from, not her illness alone, that has been healed, but from her sufferings.

We can only speculate, as I have been doing, as to what else was going on in her life. Jesus says nothing about the cause of her illness, he does not warn her about fleeing sin, so this illness was not a result of any error on her part. We can only imagine from other stories in the Gospels what being freed from her suffering meant, but there is every reason to believe that all the heartache and self-condemnation, the sense of being unclean, unworthy, unlovely were also washed away with the clean words of Jesus blessing. To put it in today's language of ministry, she was healed body, soul and spirit, physical healing, and inner healing.

This is the difference between ministry and all other types of helps. Ministry seeks to meet the needs of people by the power of the Holy Spirit and from God's resources. This is the sort of thing we would like to do in a prayer Café that I have mentioned. Ministry, not psychology or sympathy but ministry! More about that another time.

There is one other aspect of this story that is of importance. It is the observation that this woman was the only person in the crowd that day who touched Jesus and received a jolt of power from His person. It is not a simple matter to decide what happened in that moment, but this is my take on it. The woman came to Jesus with faith. She touched the robe of the man Jesus, and received a jolt of Power from the God who was incarnate in Jesus.

It was not that she took something from Jesus that He did not want to do, but she, as it were, laid hold of Him with a true faith such that God could not, and would not deny, and He responded from heaven at once without even telling Jesus!. I say this in the limitation of language, even before God could tell Jesus what to do, this woman's faith received it! Now don't take that last sentence too seriously, but the point is this, that God responded to the faith of this lady as a magnet responds to iron, it drew power out of Jesus!

As far as I can see, the only other time people touched the hem of His robe for healing, was after they had begged to be permitted to do so. We find that reference in Matthew 14. This woman touched Jesus in hope, in faith as regards His person. There are no promises in the Bible that if someone touches the robe of Christ they will be healed, so there is no promise to plead. Faith in all its splendor, takes from Jesus, and faith in all its splendor can still take from Jesus what it needs even if there is no specific promise in the Bible. The condition though is that we must want Jesus for Himself, and not only for what He can give. This may not seem a big thing, but it is crucial to the outcome of this incident. If we receive Him, then everything else is in Him even if we do not get all we want at the present time.

So what do we learn about God the Father from this account of the sick woman. We see that God is quick to respond to those who come to Him for help in faith. Even if all other things have been tried and failed, God will respond to faith and not be huffy that we come to Him as a last port of call and not the first. We learn that there is no-one who is so unclean or isolated or run down or chronically ill that Jesus will recoil against them. God the Father has received people more unclean than us, so we can have hope that

He will receive us also. It also shows us the high regard God has for faith, especially the faith that has as its focus the person of Christ. This shows us that the main attention of our lives should be to desire and respond in faith to the person of Christ, even letting Him decide what blessings to give. The woman came in hope of receiving healing and left with healing, affirmation of her faith, peace, and freedom from all her sufferings. Touch the person of Christ and discover that God is rich and generous in mercies, and knows exactly what we need in every aspect of our lives. God knows, and He cares.