

Trinity Baptist Church
Sunday 21st March 2020. Andy Banks.
Mark 5:21-43 'Jesus' Authority Over Sickness and Death'

We're continuing our series in Mark's Gospel, asking ourselves Jesus' own question, "Who do you say I am?" We read today from Mark 5:21-43, which will be very familiar to anyone who has seen the film *The Miracle Maker*, since, with a large amount of dramatic licence, the little girl in this story is given a central place in that film.

[Read Mark 5:21-43]

21When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered round him while he was by the lake. 22Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. 23He pleaded earnestly with him, 'My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.' 24So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed round him. 25And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' 29Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

30At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned round in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'

31'You see the people crowding against you,' his disciples answered, 'and yet you can ask, "Who touched me?"'

32But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.'

35While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. 'Your daughter is dead,' they said. 'Why bother the teacher anymore?'

36Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, 'Don't be afraid; just believe.'

37He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. 38When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.' 40But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha koum!' (which means 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'). 42Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. 43He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

[Pray]

What pushes someone to breaking point? Since Meghan Markle's statement in her Oprah interview that she felt suicidal in the course of her Royal duties, the press and social media have been filled with strongly voiced opinions about the truth or otherwise of her statement – because, of course, we're all well placed to judge that despite not knowing her! The tragedy is that therefore the far more important question about how we can support the *many* who struggle, often silently, with such feelings is lost. One of *my* friends at university also battled with suicidal feelings, and I learnt a lot from him of what it means to cling to faith in God in the

midst of great struggles. I also learned a lot at that time about wrestling with God in prayer. One day especially sticks in my memory. I went for a walk in the countryside, and I was crying out loudly to God asking, "What are you doing? Why are you not healing him?" And Jesus reminded me of the story of Lazarus, and his delay before he went to his friend when he heard that he was sick. And Jesus said to me in effect, "I care about your friend like I cared about Lazarus. But there's a purpose in this delay, and it's the same purpose I had then. It is for my greater glory."

Does it ever feel like your prayers are falling on deaf ears? Does it ever feel like Jesus is delaying too long? Well, imagine being *this* woman, suffering twelve long *years* of continual haemorrhaging. Aside from the physical suffering, her condition made her unclean and so unfit to worship God at the temple or join in with normal life. And to make matters worse, she spent all her life's savings on doctors, but she just got worse! Where was God in all of this? Why was he not hearing her cry for help? Or imagine being Jairus, with his 12-year-old daughter at death's door; with Jesus coming to help, but waylaid at the crucial moment. And so, she died. Why the delay, Jesus? Couldn't you have come a bit quicker?

These are tough questions. And they're real questions. I'm aware that for some of us they are far from *hypothetical* questions – without always the happy endings that we see in these passages! And it's important that we acknowledge *that* reality before we look at what we can learn from these two miracles. Sometimes we have to find a pathway with God, when the answer to our prayers is not even, "Wait," but, "No."

It could have felt at times to the woman in this story, that God had answered, "No," to her prayers. Twelve long years she waited for healing. And it's not as though she did nothing to help herself. She saw doctor after doctor, spending all she had in the process – there was no NHS in Israel – yet all human help proved impotent, and her prayers to God for help could have appeared so, too. It would be easy to give up asking, wouldn't it? We don't know how close she came to that. But the narrative suggests that, somehow, she didn't come *that* close to it. For when she heard about Jesus – and we assume about his miraculous healing ministry – she showed incredible *faith*. She didn't need Jesus to *speak* to her, or to *lay his hands* on her, or anything like that – she believed him to be so powerful that, just by touching the edge of his cloak, she could be healed. And she was right! She was healed! Mark wants us to take note that Jesus is *that* powerful.

But this woman had another problem alongside her haemorrhaging, perhaps made worse by her suffering at the hands of many who were meant to heal her: she was fearful. We don't know exactly what she feared. But, since she tried to carry out her plan in *secret*, and since she fell at Jesus' feet *trembling* when she realised that she couldn't go unnoticed, it is clear that she feared either Jesus' reaction, or the crowd's reaction, or both. Maybe she didn't feel she was worthy of his help. Maybe she was worried that he might charge her money that she couldn't pay. Maybe, she feared speaking as a woman in public, especially about such personal matters. Who knows? But she was fearful. And some of us, also, still approach Jesus in *fear* that he might react badly if we ask him for what we want in prayer.

Jesus didn't let her get away with her plan of secrecy, precisely because there was more at stake than her physical healing. He knew power had gone out from him, though interestingly he seems to have been genuinely unaware of who it went out to – perhaps we see here something of the self-limitation involved in God the Son becoming *fully* human! Of course, part of the dynamic in him stopping to find out who touched him may have been the importance of a public confession of faith. It wasn't enough for this woman to believe in Jesus secretly in her heart, she needed to confess her belief with her mouth, as Romans 10:9 says. And this was a costly and embarrassing confession. Technically she'd broken the Law too, as an unclean person touching a clean person, so perhaps she feared punishment, though the account makes nothing of that.

But Jesus didn't engineer this confession out of her to be mean; rather he had a deeper work of *healing* to perform for her, for which her public confession was necessary. She needed to hear that what she did was ok; better than ok, it was good! Jesus would not allow her to spend the rest of her life feeling guilty for seeking his help. "Daughter ..." – a term of respect and affection, with not insignificant spiritual undertones – "Daughter, your faith has [more literally] *saved* you. Go in peace and be *freed* from your suffering." What was God's purpose in delaying answering her prayer? Could it be so that she would meet Jesus, come to a knowledge of him as both Lord and Saviour, and through him come to a far better understanding of God's compassionate character? It's certainly possible, isn't it?

Then we come to Jairus. The delay for him was far shorter, yet even more dramatic. Time was absolutely of the essence. His daughter was at death's door! In *The Miracle Maker*, he is portrayed as wrestling with his conscience under the pressure from higher religious leaders who stood against Jesus, but we don't know if he went through such turmoil. Nor do we know how long his daughter was sick before he went to Jesus. But he went, and things looked up, as Jesus agreed to go with him. Yet those few minutes of delay, as the crowds jostled Jesus, and as he stopped to call out the woman, were literally fatal. What must it have felt like to hear those words, "Your daughter is dead ... Why bother the teacher anymore?" And how easy would it have been to believe those words to be true – "There's nothing Jesus can do for a dead person!"

Interestingly, in the original Greek, Jesus' response is written in the form that suggests continual action. "Don't keep fearing; go on believing!" Jesus challenged Jairus to a deeper faith than he had previously thought possible. And Jairus rose to the challenge, even with the defeatist words of his servants wringing in his ears, and despite the derisive laughter of the crowds who had gathered at his house to mourn. And so, he and his wife were privy to a revelation which, at this stage, only Jesus' closest three disciples were permitted also to see. Jesus had already shown himself to be Lord over sickness, demons, even the violent forces of nature itself. Now he demonstrated that he is Lord over life and death. He holds a power and authority that only God holds – the power to overcome the final great enemy, which is death.

Yes, both Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament had been used by God to resuscitate people back to life (*1 Kings 17:20-21 and 2 Kings 4:33-35*). But in both cases, the narrative is clear that the power to restore life was granted by *God* in answer to prayer. There is no record of Jesus praying before raising Jairus' daughter back to life, he simply commanded it, and it happened. He is Lord over life and death. As such, this incident foreshadows the greatest and most central miracle of the whole Bible – Jesus' own resurrection. Jairus' daughter's *earthly* life was extended, yet she would still have been subject to sickness and death in the future. But Jesus truly rose from the dead to a permanent indestructible and incorruptible life. And *his* resurrection enables *us* also to rise again to eternal life after we die.

So, what was the purpose in Jesus' delay with Jairus? Was it just a coincidence? Or, like with the delay before raising Lazarus in John's Gospel, did Jesus have a purpose to give Jairus and his wife, his own disciples, and us who read this Gospel, a far greater understanding of who he truly is? He is Lord not just over sickness, but over death itself, displaying authority and power that God alone has? Could it be that this delay was to give them a glimpse of the far greater miracle of Jesus' own resurrection to come? Sometimes, God has a greater purpose in delaying the answer to our prayers. And, as with Jairus and this woman, he calls us to keep trusting him in the wait. Will you trust him?

[Pray]