

'It's about faith'

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

Blessed be the Lord whose unfailing love for me was wonderful. – Ps.31,21

Collect:

Almighty God, you have taught us through your Son that love fulfils the law. Grant us grace to love you with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Look forward in faith -
all time is in God's hand.
Walk humbly with him
and trust his future plan.
God has wisely led
his people by his power.
Look forward in hope,
he gives us each new day.

Look forward in faith -
the world is in God's care.
His purpose of love
he calls on us to share.
In our neighbour's need,
the Lord is present still.
He blesses the meek!
The earth will know God's will.

Look forward in faith -
God gives us life each day.
Go onward with Christ,
his Spirit guides our way.
Now God lets us live
within the sphere of grace.
Trust ever in him –

he rules o'er earth and space!

A. Scobie

Mk.5,21-43

Dear friends

If we hear this story of Jesus' double miracle and its attending circumstances and do so in the way Mark intends us to and Jesus would want us to, we should realise what the main character of this story is, i.e. what this story seeks to enlighten us all about – and that's *faith*.

This solves the puzzling fact of the seemingly contradictory ways in which Jesus involves the public in the two cases. Because in the case of the woman "*who had been bleeding for twelve years*" Jesus insists that the healing become known and be in the open and that everybody hears what he says to her. But in the second instance of healing he shuts the public out and gives "*strict orders not to let anyone know about this.*" Though these two responses are different they are seen to serve the same cause when this cause is understood to be 'faith'. Because all must hear the words, "*Your faith has healed you*", the fact of her healing must be out in the open. But those who have heard him say to the father, "*Don't be afraid, just believe*", must then be prevented from what would detract from that and would cause the conversation to go off-topic.

It's about *faith*. But why is faith of such importance? Why should faith be claimed to be a main character in the story that is life? There are many, as we know, who say 'We get by very well without it, thank you very much' and would commend their stance too. And there is a vast body of opinion which holds that the question of what a person does or does not believe is not as relevant as all that, is a private matter, a low-order issue. Does it matter very much what anyone believes?

Yet, the reason why faith is of such importance is not that you cannot get by without it, you can. But it's that you are not saved without it, that you are not made well without it, that you cannot go in peace without it. It's not that it cannot be made a low-order issue, it can, just like it can be made a high-order issue, but both is beside the point. No, it's that life which ought to be a true and uplifting conversation (love of God and of one's neighbour) is patently and seriously off-topic for *some* reason – and that reason has everything to do with *faith*.

What, then, does this story, with Jesus at the centre of it, tell us about faith? One thing touches on an area where, I think, we are much in need of light. It appears in Jesus' answer to the woman, "*Daughter, your faith has healed you*".

This, does it not, sounds like Jesus affirms what many instinctively hold to be true and what is promoted in many books and films: *What* a person believes in doesn't matter so much as the fact *that* she believes. The power of faith, of believing, lies in its potential to self-heal and self-improve. Faith can be pretty un-doctrinal and needn't be tied to any particular object or truth, it is free to attach itself to whatever *exercises* it.

I remember going to a church service at which I found I was being invited together with everyone else there to 'bring your own god' (not so much CofS as BYOG) – an example of this idea and understanding of faith. What faith is *in* doesn't matter so much as the *exercise* of faith itself, a person's *believing*.

But Jesus is not teaching that the woman healed herself by her faith. The power that healed her did not go out from her (!), as the story states: "*At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from*

him.” No power, no healing. The reason that her faith healed her was that she sought that power in Christ. For 12 years she had sought healing elsewhere and everywhere, believing every time in hope that her money would be well spent. But it was to no avail.

Therefore, let’s not empty faith of all its power and its truth by holding and declaring that it works anywhere and anyhow! Or that whatever power there may be, it works with or without faith!

There is a question we must not avoid asking, because we cannot afford to do so, if we recognise the place and importance of faith for our lives to be made well and be at peace, and it is this: “Who actually has the power [Mt.6,13: *for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever*] to make life well and give it peace? Who, actually, has the power to save life, to “*forgive all our sins and heal all our diseases*” (Ps.103,3), so that our way through these things (sins and suffering) is to life? Who has the power actually to make of death nothing but a sleep from which *by his word* a person shall be raised? From whom does such power come out and is made available to faith for seizing upon and owning?”

The actual answer is that it is the one who was sought and found by the woman who was subject to bleeding and by Jairus whose daughter lay dying.

This, dear friends, is the proposal here: that there is a place from which this power comes forth – here/for us through faith: Christ who became powerless for us on the cross where he bore our sins and died our death and who rose from the dead in the power of God to be with us and to be for us the power of the resurrection.

That is the proposal here, and it stands in contrast to all others which do not know of such a place. And faith will prove either, by deciding whose word it believes: The word of him whose word searches out those he heals (“*Who has touched me?*”), or the word of those whose words and thoughts and deeds do no more than show that they don’t have the answer. The word of him who says, ‘*The child is not dead but asleep*’, or the words of those who laugh at his word and are busy with themselves and wail and cry when left without comfort.

What helped the woman and Jairus to believe and find saving faith in Christ was that they both had and were, acutely so, aware of their issue – bleeding in the case of the woman and care for a sick child in the case of Jairus. This was their signpost to faith in Christ, who said (after all): “*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*” (Mk.2,17)

And this is faith’s signpost to Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer, for all. Therefore, do we know our issue? That we need to be made well? And freed from suffering? That we need the light of peace? That we sin? That we are destined to die and after that to face judgment (Hebr.9,27)? The want of moral health, the want of purity and holiness? A fear of death? A guilty conscience that darkens life? Yes, with all this man has an issue. Question is whether we face and know it and respond to it in the way the woman and Jairus did.

Dear friends, Jesus says to Jairus, ‘*Don’t be afraid; just believe.*’ With this he points to just what a glorious thing faith is which fastens itself to him: for to it is given the promise and pledge of the power of God to save to the utmost through grace and mercy.

AMEN

Lord God, in Christ we hear your word and see that everything is possible for him who believes. We thank you for the power that is in him, your power, to make us well, for bringing to light life and

immortality through the forgiveness of sins. Grant us by your Spirit to seek and know Christ like the woman who came to him with her issue and like Jairus with his so that like them we may find your help and know your love. Amen

- time of prayer / intercession – [we give thanks for God’s mercy and faithfulness, for the compassion and steadfast love he has for all that he has made, that all his judgments are just and righteous, that he is our refuge and the helper of all who call to him; we pray for those who have become ill, are fighting illness or are recovering from it, for those who care for the needs of others; for those in positions of leadership and authority: that they may rule wisely and seek peace, that they may guard the values by which a society can flourish, that they may lead with courage and wisdom, for a turning to the light that is God’s Word; for those who have lost loved ones, need comfort into their grieving and the loving presence of friends; we give thanks for all the help we have received and still experience, for grace and answered prayers; we pray for the despondent and the hopeless, for those who seek light, for the wisdom to comfort the suffering; we pray for our sister church in Northern India and for the body of Christ worldwide and here, for our church, the church’s leadership; we think of the situation in India, Nepal and other places, the suffering of the people there and elsewhere, the attempt of the authorities to regain control; we give thanks for the help that is being delivered; we pray for the situation in Israel, the rift between the Palestinians and the Jews; for perseverance in the determination to share our means with those who lack them; we pray for God’s blessing on the preaching and teaching of His word, for people to respond in repentance and faith, for freedom and liberty and courage to stand for what is good and true and honours His name;]

‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

Now may the peace of God which passes all our understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN
