

Jesus meets despair and death      Trinity 4      Will Halse

Have you ever been in a race against time, and seen things go wrong, one after another as your hopes of making the deadline seem to slip away? Then you may be able to walk a short distance in the shoes of Jairus, so desperate for Jesus to touch his daughter, to heal her before she slips into death; before her soul departs from her dying body.

Jesus had left Capernaum in the evening, a day or two earlier. He had left the crowd behind and crossed the Sea of Galilee. Through a furious squall, and the stilling of the storm Jesus and his disciples had reached the other side – the region of the Gerasenes, who were Gentiles. Jesus healed the demoniac, a herd of pigs was lost to the sea, and very soon the people are begging Jesus to leave.

Jairus doesn't know all this, but it is actually very good news for him; and for his precious daughter. Jesus returns across the lake to Capernaum; probably sooner than he had planned. Immediately on his arrival a large crowd has gathered. And within the crowd, Jairus, whose name means 'God gives light'; Jairus, a man in the grip of despair, desperate to reach Jesus, to beg for his help. A man in despair. A man facing an abyss, the loss of his only daughter. If he is anything like me his wife had probably told him to go to Jesus days ago; she had told him to go and ask for help when their daughter first became ill, before Jesus sailed off into that storm. Perhaps he had been praying and hoping for a change in his daughter. But suddenly her life is slipping away, and he is desperate. Jairus reaches Jesus. 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be made well and live.' And Jesus goes with Jairus.

But there is a big problem. It's a huge crowd. I watched on TV as medics rushed to save Christian Eriksen after his heart attack on the pitch.

People crying. Many praying. Lifesaving. But here in this crowd progress is so slow. People of all shapes and sizes trying to get close to Jesus. Can anyone see the agony of impatience consuming Jairus? Please make way, make space, let Jesus to move, quickly. My daughter is dying.

How must Jairus have felt when Jesus slows to a standstill, and asks that question? Who touched me? Jairus is not the only desperate person in that crowd. There is another. A young woman, who has suffered a haemorrhage for 12 years, probably most of her adult life. This menstrual bleeding has cut her off from worship and made her ritually unclean. She has tried many remedies, religious and medical, all to no avail. Nothing has worked. But she reaches out.

This woman is desperate to touch even the fringe of Jesus' clothing. Jesus would have been wearing a Chaluq, a long close fitting linen or wool undergarment, woven in a single piece, that reached down to his feet. And over this, a very wide scarf, almost like a fringed blanket, called a tallith. It is probably a corner of this that the woman would have reached and touched. And as she touches, she receives healing. It seems that it is not Jesus who heals her; Jesus does not reach out to touch her; yet healing flows to her from Jesus.

'Who touched me?' Why would Jesus embarrass this woman, who wants to slip away quietly? Many of us want to keep our faith and experience private? Why make this woman uncomfortable just because she has been healed? And why stop and stoke up the pressure, add to the agony of impatience, in poor Jairus?

Jesus looks around to try to find her. Because there is something more important for this woman than her healing. She needs to meet with Jesus. When we come together to worship we use words, we use music, we use silence, in communion we use bread and wine; But what is the object of the words, the music, the bread and wine? What is the purpose

of meeting together over the phone? It is to meet with Jesus. We come together so that Jesus can speak to us; can touch us. These are ways, sacraments that help bring us to Jesus.

She wanted to touch the edge of Jesus' clothes, to be healed in body. Jesus wanted to touch her soul. It was important for her to meet Jesus, and for Jesus to affirm her. 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and in health and be healed of your disease'.

We pray for people in our intercessions, we pray for healing; how important is it that those whom we pray for meet Jesus?

We come back to Jairus, but only to realise – the Teacher is too late; why trouble him? your daughter is dead. Only then does Jesus speak directly to Jairus, 'Do not fear, only believe'. This is a word that Jesus speaks to each one of us. 'Do not fear, only believe'.

Only now does Jesus detach himself from the crowd, bringing with him only his three closest companions, Peter, James and John. There may have been a mix of family, friends and hired mourners already on site. Their mourning quickly changes to mocking when he tells them the child is sleeping. They know that the girl is dead. They had seen that she is dead. No one could sleep with that noise going on.

Jairus, meanwhile seems passive, stupefied; stricken, numb. His daughter has died. All these people have come to his house all this has happened since he left (was it really hours ago) to find Jesus. He says nothing. He just follows Jesus. He allows Jesus to take charge. Jesus does some very necessary tidying up. He puts out the mourners.

And then Jesus takes the father, the mother, Peter, James, John into the room where the child lay dead; with Jesus there was a group of six. Jesus

took the girl's hand and spoke two words in Aramaic, 'Talitha qum' . 'Young woman, arise'.

Jesus has power to heal. But here we see more; that Jesus has power over death itself. For us this is a pointer towards the resurrection of Jesus and his victory over death. Yet so simple.

So what should be our response? In the face of illness let us seek Jesus first; as we pray let us pray not just for healing for those we pray for, but for the touch of Jesus on hearts and lives. And in the face of illness, even in the face of death let us take to heart His words, 'Do not fear; only believe'.