

Bible study on Mark 5.21-43

Begin with an opening prayer

Lord, it is so easy to be part of the crowd,
following behind others,
not knowing what is taking place in front.
Give us the power to make our way through the moving throng,
and the courage to touch you,
to receive that life-transforming experience.
But we also ask that you stop and turn around,
and call us by name,
saying those words that make us know
we are completely forgiven and unconditionally loved.
Amen.

Read the passage

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

Mark intertwines two stories of faith and healing. The crowds press all around and form the backdrop for a father's desperation and a woman's shame. The woman's health problem would have made her continually ritually 'unclean'. The view of menstruation within Judaism meant that women spent a period of time apart and then ritually cleansed themselves with prayers and washing before returning to full involvement with the life of their families (Leviticus 15.19). Women who continually lost blood also lost this rhythm of life, and so could not marry or be fully part of the spiritual life of the family. No wonder the woman was determined to keep her problem secret! We learn from her story that physical power could flow out from Jesus without his conscious choosing. Her silent faith was enough to summon forth healing, and Jesus knew that it had happened. Not content with this wordless contact, however, Jesus seeks her out to hear her story. While all this is happening, Jairus is willing Jesus forward through

the crowd, that Jesus might be in time to heal his daughter. The needs of the woman must have felt like a life-threatening distraction. Then the news comes that his daughter has indeed died; they are too late – except they are not. It is as if the original choice of Jesus – to accompany them and to heal the girl – still prevails. Even death cannot prevent this healing. Jesus does not intend that the story of him raising the dead should spread. He is already famous in an almost out of control way, as the huge crowds indicate. His concern is for the life of this family, and he gives her amazed parents a very practical instruction – give her something to eat.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

We do not know whether anyone in the crowd saw the woman touch Jesus' cloak, though Jesus certainly felt her touch. When he asked about this, his disciples pointed to the crowd and asked, what did he expect? But Jesus knew. We know very little about the woman, but her condition probably meant that she lived a fairly solitary life. And the crowd probably had their eyes so focused on Jesus and what he could do for them that they failed to notice her at all. Is there a danger that we can be like those in the crowd? Are we so focused on getting the Lord to meet our needs that we fail to notice the spiritual and material needs of others? While there is nothing wrong with having our gaze fixed on Jesus, we must also make sure that our eyes are on those who are equally made in God's image. We must see those whom Jesus sees.

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



- What is happening in this image?
- How aware are you of barriers that may hinder you from helping others?
- When have you experienced crossing boundaries?

Prayer

A prayer of thanksgiving

We give you thanks, Lord, that your healing ministry transcended cultural and social barriers. We pray for a cleansing of all prejudice, and for those whose illness or situation distances them from others. We pray especially for the mentally ill, the homeless, for refugees and all on the fringes of society. May they, and all creation, know your healing and accepting love, and may we all reach out where we can, in your name.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Lord, as we head into a new week,
help us to be people who choose to stand out from the crowd,
rather than simply to follow it.

By the power of your Spirit,
help us to also step out of our comfort zones,
and give us the courage to challenge barriers
that confine or constrain or control us.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.