

Becoming like Christwith a faithful heart

Mark 5:21-43

Our title this morning is "Becoming like Christ with a faithful heart." This is the last talk in this series. Next Sunday Terry will be helping us make the transition from our period of vacancy to the arrival of Jon a week on Wednesday. It's going to be exciting!

Each Sunday this year, in our Becoming like Christ series, we have been looking at a different aspect of Jesus' personality and thinking about how we might develop more of that attribute in our own lives.

One thing seems clear, the Christian life is all about transformation. A journey, where God who loves us too much to leave us as we are, offers us the hope and opportunity to change, to be healed and to move towards becoming our best selves. We can't make this happen but we can choose to be open to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to do His work within us.

This morning's gospel reading from Mark tells us 2 stories of healing miracles. One of an unknown woman who had been suffering for 12 years sandwiched in between the story of the resurrection of a 12 year old girl, the raising of Jairus' daughter. My hope is that by studying these stories we will be more able to choose to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In looking at these stories we'll be thinking about fear, risk, and vulnerability. You might prefer it if I said I'd focus on happiness, contentment and chocolate! Sorry! We all know life isn't easy and God seems to have set things up so that we move into a more fruitful time, either after or at the same time as a tough time.

Let's think about the Mark reading. Jesus was the talk of the town, probably Capernaum, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus stepped out of the boat, word quickly went round and everyone stopped what they were doing and ran to see what Jesus would do today. Two of those in the crowd were Jairus, a senior Jewish official, a ruler of the synagogue, and a sick woman. But they weren't there out of curiosity, they were seeking Jesus because they were desperate. Desperate for help.

The woman had tried everything, she'd spent all her money trying the remedies of different Doctors and nothing had worked. Jesus was her last hope.

Jairus was desperate because his daughter was dying. Speed was of the essence to him, he had to get Jesus to his daughter. Jesus was his last hope.

Both Jairus and the woman were afraid. Jairus had to put aside his fears about losing his reputation. What would people say "A man of his position seeking out the help of an itinerant preacher with no official qualifications? Really! What would his superiors think? What about his credibility with his congregation?"

The woman was afraid, she was bleeding and considered "unclean" by society; she shouldn't be out mixing with people. What would happen if she was found out?

Fear can impact us in different ways. It can paralyse us or spur us into action. Here, their fear motivated them to push through the crowd and get to Jesus. How very unEnglish! No queuing and waiting patiently for their turn to come. They were desperate. They had to take a risk. They were

prepared to make themselves vulnerable. They needed action and from everything they had heard Jesus could help them. I imagine them thinking "This might be my only chance, I've got to take it!"

Jairus and the woman, both push through the crowd to get to Jesus. Jairus has the confidence to stop Jesus, fall at his feet and ask for what he wants. Jesus listens, has compassion on him and is willing to help him. They start heading for Jairus's house. This is when the woman sees her chance. She pushes through the crowd, bends down, reaches out her arm and touches his cloak, thinking "if I can touch His clothes I will be healed". This is the moment(photo). Notice the spot of light, this illustrates the power that passes from Jesus to the woman. She is healed.

Then the sea of people come to a halt. Jesus says "Who touched me?" "Are you crazy?" A disciple says. "You are surrounded by people, of course, they are touching you." But Jesus knew power had gone out of Him and the woman knew the bleeding had stopped and she had been healed. Filled with fear the woman, knows she must own up, she falls at Jesus feet and tells him the whole story. What a relief she must have felt when Jesus spoke to her, the first word he said was "Daughter" one word, so rich in meaning, she was accepted by him, she belonged to his family. Jesus told her it was Ok, her faith had healed her. Not "I healed you" but "your belief that I could heal you has enabled you to receive your healing from me". There is a hugely important principle here. The Kingdom of God is interactive. We have choice. Our participation is required! Our faith is a matter of saying yes to God and being open to Him. Often this participation will require risk and making ourselves vulnerable. And we don't like it, vulnerability can be very uncomfortable.

Back to the story; all this time Jairus is getting more agitated, can you imagine him hopping from one foot to the other, "come on what's the delay, time is of the essence". Then the moment he's been dreading, he sees someone from his household approaching, his heart sinks, he is told his daughter has died. Jesus intervenes "don't believe him, believe me, don't be afraid, have faith, trust me"; that's a tall order but isn't that exactly what Jesus asks of us today.

We know there is a wonderfully happy ending to this story. This time it is Jesus who reaches out his arm to take the little girl's hand, life flows into her and she gets up. What amazement, joy and celebration there must have been that day.

I love the detail in these gospel stories. These details indicate that they aren't made up stories but real eye witness accounts. How about the little interchange with the disciples where Jesus says "who touched me". If you are making up a dramatic story I doubt you'd include these little down to earth details and you certainly wouldn't mention women and bleeding, that would definitely come under the "too much information category"! Also I love that Jesus tells her parents to feed the little girl, she has been raised but she'll still need care to regain her strength. And the Aramaic words Jesus says to the child "talitha kum!" Which would have been an everyday phrase, the equivalent of "come on sweetheart, it's time to get up". The extraordinary and the ordinary interweave quite naturally when Jesus is around. Being raised from death and waking up in the morning.

How I long to see more of our ordinary days becoming extraordinary through Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The truth is, it's all extraordinary but it's only occasionally we see it.

That's why I love New Wine so much. New Wine is a place where extraordinary things happen to ordinary people. I work on the Pastoral Prayer team. People desperate for change, they make themselves vulnerable by coming to share what is on their heart and pray with a complete stranger. That takes courage. But it is privilege and joy for me seeing how the Holy Spirit guides these times. Probably only 30-45 minutes, and I can't share in detail for reasons of confidentiality, but seeing a person leave, lighter knowing their pain is healed, is amazing. They are filled with hope that the future will be different.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to keep us growing and changing. Transforming us to become more like Jesus. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable is the key to ongoing growth. Trouble is vulnerability is uncomfortable. There is no vulnerability without risk, every time we open up we take

a risk. Risk of being made a fool of, risk of rejection, feeling stupid. But counterbalancing this, is the chance of getting to know someone better, feeling closer, experiencing more love, the chance of being healed, the chance of new life and feeling great joy. Risk equals opportunity, and, I am convinced that the more we pray the more of these opportunities we will see, or God incidences as we like to call them.

If today prayer is our way of meeting with Jesus and if in prayer we try to be open to the One, who loves us more than we can imagine, then prayer will always involve risk and vulnerability. It's why those who come for prayer ministry are brave. We need faith to want to pray at all, but a tiny bit will do, prayer can give us the chance, like Jairus and the woman, of marvellous things happening in our lives and the lives of those we love, as we become more like Christ.

Amen.