

Pentecost 6, Year B, 30 June 2024

Lamentations 3:22-33, 2 Corinthians 8:7-15, Mark 5:21-43

In today's gospel reading Mark continues to write those things he wants us to understand about Jesus. And as a result I am asking whether our understanding of, and relationship with, Jesus is shaped by the reality of what we read in the scriptures, or rather by the reality of our personal experience.

In our gospel reading we have two healings. It may be that Mark is using his usual sandwich technique with the interjection of the healing of the menstruating woman in the story of Jairus's daughter. But equally likely is that Mark wrote it like this to show the passage of time.

And these accounts fall hard on the heels of the healing of the demonised Gentile man on the other side of the Lake. Mark seems to be showing us how Jesus is there for everyone, Gentile and Jew alike, without discrimination. And in today's passage there is no discrimination between Jews either. Jairus the ruler of the synagogue, is a well-respected Jewish leader.

He is not ordained but an elected layperson given the responsibility for both the synagogue building and the weekly services. Think David, Alan and Ian rolled into one with a bit of Nick's Sunday rota organisation thrown in!

At the other end of the scale the woman who touches Jesus's clothes is, according to Jewish law, an unclean outcast because of the blood. But Jesus treats all alike. Both the little girl and the woman are healed, as was the Gadarene.

And Jesus is also approachable. Both the respected official and the unclean woman approach Jesus for healing. Maybe with some trepidation and driven by necessity but still feeling that they can ask.

And I wonder is this non-discriminatory, approachable Jesus the Jesus we know. Do we recognise that, however unworthy or ashamed we feel, Jesus doesn't see anyone as unworthy and will welcome us all? Do we feel that we can bring him our needs or is he the last resort?

It is sobering to remember that the bible has harsh words for those who, while knowing God, rely on others for help – physicians for example – without consulting God at all.

So, when I pray for my or another's needs is the Jesus to whom I pray, this Jesus in Mark 5? Or is the Jesus of my prayer life a mere shadow? Do I approach Jesus in prayer knowing that he can meet my needs, even expecting that he will? Or have I become disillusioned? Have I modified my view of Jesus to fit the reality of my experience, rather than striving to know, and align with, the Jesus of Mark's gospel?

Because Jesus is powerful. When the woman who touches his clothes is healed Jesus knows that power has gone out from him. But this does not lessen his power; there is a constant wellspring. Jesus still has power to bring Jairus's dead daughter back to life. His power, not just his compassion, is a constant.

So I have to ask, does my faith come anywhere close to that of the woman or Jairus?

If I bring a need to Jesus do I make a specific request with expectation, like they did, either openly or silently?

Or do I just come with a shopping list and expect God to fill in the blanks? You know: Father, I pray for vegetables in the greengrocer, meat in the butcher's, the Middle East, Mrs Smith down the road and the General Election.

Jairus and the woman knew precisely what they were asking of Jesus – Jairus with words and she with her action in touching Jesus's clothes. And both Paul and John write of making specific requests to Jesus. So let us do the same.

Has this passage, or the gospels in general, given any indication of the approach we should take to those in need of healing around us? The key concepts in this passage are, I think, faith, power and word. We have already spoken about Jairus's and the woman's faith. But Jesus has faith too. He goes with Jairus to see his daughter because he has faith that he will heal her.

Before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead he prays out loud *"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here"* (John 11:41-42).

It would seem that, at least on occasions, Jesus's ability to heal and to restore life is a consequence of his personal prayer life, of his own faith in the Father.

So Jesus has faith. And he has power. We read: (the woman) *thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.'* *Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him.*

Wow! Wow. Imagine being so full of Holy Spirit power that people could be healed just by brushing past us in the Coop! It happens. Well maybe not yet in Wast Linton.

In Luke (5:17) we read *The power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal those who were ill* and (6:19) *The people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.*

So Jesus has power, Holy Spirit power poured into him after his time of temptation in the wilderness.

So that's Jesus. What about us? You may guess where I'm going with this. Because we have access to the same Holy Spirit power as Jesus had.

In Matthew 10 we read how Jesus taught his disciples how to use his authority to heal, by sending them out on a one-off training exercise. But he also said (John 14:12) *Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing and You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you* (Acts 1:8). This is more constant than the one-off training exercise.

I contend that sometimes when Mrs Smith needs healing it is not enough just to mention this to the Father in prayer, not enough even to be specific in our request on her behalf. Sometimes we should be being Jesus for her, exercising the power of Holy Spirit in us to heal. Would that it were so, even just occasionally.

So faith and power. But also word.

Not here the words of prayer but the words spoken directly into the situation to bring healing. *"Little girl, I say to you, get up!"*

I'd love to know if anyone here has had experience of such a situation of faith, power and word with a positive outcome.

So far I have been speaking of our approach to ministering to the needs of those around us. But what about our own needs?

Is there something dead or dying in us that needs resurrection? Hope perhaps, or passion, or perseverance?

What about our needs for healing, our need to reach out and touch the hem of his garment? Perhaps not for physical healing – although it might be - but perhaps for feelings of shame, of hurt, of rejection for example.

Whatever situation we are in let us this morning reach out to touch the hem of his garment in expectation of a touch from Jesus.

And I should love to pray in this regard with any who would like me to, and for you to pray for me.

So this morning let us determine to raise our expectations of the Christian life, of Jesus, of Holy Spirit beyond our lived reality and up to something much more like knowing and experiencing the Jesus in Mark's gospel. Amen

Chris Shaw
30 June 2024