



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Some Principles of Faith

Mark 5:21-43; Lamentations 3:23-33

27th June 2021

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Last week I said that in the gospel account we are shown the authority Jesus has over sickness, nature and the demonic. Today, we continue with that discovery. He has power over chronic infirmity and death.

Both the conditions encountered in this gospel passage carried ritual impurity for those who were in contact with them. Anything which was in contact with the woman who was bleeding would be considered unclean. Anyone who touched a dead body was unclean. Yet, when Jesus had contact with those conditions he cleansed and restored them! The life in him was stronger than death in the little girl. His purity cleansed the uncleanness.

Don't You care?

We heard last week, the disciples in their fear during the storm, wake Jesus crying out, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown!" Today we hear the answer from three sources.

In the Old Testament reading, Jeremiah the prophet is writing in the midst of great suffering. Israel has broken covenant with God. The land has been invaded and the people conquered. So many have been killed or raped. The beloved, holy temple has been destroyed. All is ruins and despair. It is in the midst of this horror and misery, that he makes the great affirmation of Lamentations 3:19-25:

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

The Story

In the gospel account, Jesus shows great compassion for these three in need: a terrified father, then not overlooking a desperate outcast woman and gently caring for a helpless little girl.

Does he care? These witnesses would say he does – his mercies are new every morning. He seeks for the outcasts to restore them; he goes after the lost and dying to rescue them.

Last week, we heard about Jesus crossing the lake and stilling the storm. He has just returned again to the Northern shore of the lake. He comes ashore and a great crowd gathers around him - all desiring his attention, his help, his touch. In the midst of this press of humanity, he gives priority to the call for help from Jairus who is desperately concerned about his sick daughter.

As Jesus goes, he senses that healing power has gone from him and asks who has touched him. The disciples are dismissive of his question pointing out the many who are pressing in on him. But he kept looking for the person.

We have been told already who she was. A woman who had had a haemorrhage for twelve years. Now that would be very worrying for us, but it was worse then. Besides the expense of the useless medical treatment she had received, it made her a spiritual and social outcast. You see, in the Law persistent bleeding made one ceremonially unclean¹. It polluted everything she wore, touched or sat on, as well as anyone who touched her or those things. That restricted daily life and social contact for twelve years! No wonder she had spent all she had on healers – but to no avail.

By the time, Jesus arrived in that place, he had a reputation – maybe he could help her. But he could not touch her – she was unclean. So she had hatched the plan to touch his garment secretly from behind. Some writers are concerned that this is just magical thinking, but there is a difference. We are told what she kept thinking, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.”² We find the same thing in the next chapter.

Mark 6:56 And wherever he went--into villages, towns or countryside-- they placed the sick in the market-places. They begged him to let them touch the edge [fringe/tassel] of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

Touching the tassels

Why this desire to touch the edge of his cloak? This is how the Messianic Jews understand this:

1. Jesus was an observant Jew and therefore wore a simple undergarment with a prayer shawl cloak over his shoulders reaching almost to the ground.
2. This had tassels on the four corners as commanded by Deut 22:12 “Make tassels on the four corners of the cloak you wear.”
3. The Hebrew word there for corner is: *kānāp* and it also means extremity and wing.
4. The same word, *kānāp*, is used by the prophet Malachi when he said of the Messiah, “The Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings.”³
5. The Jews looked at that verse and decided that the Sun of Righteousness was a reference to the Messiah. The Messiah would come with healing in his wings or extremities or corners. From that the Jews decided that the Messiah would have healing in the extremities of his prayer shawl - the tassels.
6. The Greek word here translated “edge” also means fringe or tassel.
7. So when these people beg to touch the tassels, they believe that he is the Messiah and so according to Malachi, he would have healing in the tassels of his prayer shawl.

It wasn't, “Just let me touch even the edge of your garment – that would be close enough.” Rather they were meaning, “Let me touch the tassels of your garment especially because I know that is where the Messiah has his healing.”

These people in chapter 6 showed by their actions that they believed Jesus was the Messiah. So too with the woman in chapter 5 - she knew! Jesus said to the woman, “Daughter your faith has healed you.” She believed that because he was the Messiah, she would be healed if she touched his wings – his tassels. And that faith was rewarded.

It is one thing to heal her physically and another for the local people to treat her normally again. So Jesus made a point of identifying her and declaring publicly that she was healed. This was social and psychological restoration for him.

Corporate Unbelief

While this was going on, Jairus must have been consumed with anxiety and urgency. Then to his horror he was told his daughter had died already. Does Jesus care? Jesus steadied Jairus, “Don't be afraid; just believe.”⁴ And so they move to Jairus' house. Notice, he didn't let the crowd follow him. He took just the close circle of disciples. He dismissed the mourners and went into the room with just them and the parents. There is such a thing as corporate unbelief. We find it in Matthew 13 when he went back to Nazareth his home town and the people were offended at his teaching.

... “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. ... And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, “Only in his home town and in his own house is a prophet without honour.” And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.⁵

¹ See Leviticus 15:25-27

² Mark 5:28

³ Malachi 4:2

⁴ Verse 36

⁵ Matthew 13:54-58

I think before praying for Jairus' daughter, he was clearing the air of their unbelief and scoffing so he would have the faith to work the miracle.

Does he care?

Does he care? Having gently raised the girl to life again by taking her hand and saying, "Tabitha, koum" – not a magic incantation but simply, "Little girl, get up!" he tells them to feed her.

With the woman she needed publicity for restoration, the girl probably needs no great attention, it is better for her to be left quietly with her parents. And it is better for his ministry that he be allowed to minister without being overwhelmed by extreme crowds or swept up in a premature and political campaign to hail him as deliverer from the Romans.

There are some lessons we can learn about faith.

1. **Faith opens the door** to the power of God. It makes the connection so divine power is transferred to those who are powerless. It may be weak, imperfect, it may be bold, but what counts is trust in Jesus and God. Jairus and the woman both showed faith in turning to Jesus and asking (even grasping) for healing.

2. **Faith is active.** Jairus fell on his face pleading. He walked with Jesus to the house after he had heard the child was dead. The woman conceived a plan, put it into action by creeping through the crowd to touch his tassels from behind. She acted on her faith.

3. **Faith persists in overcoming obstacles.** There were barriers the woman had to press through: fear, shame, social restraints and ceremonial taboos. The fullness of her healing came when she had the courage to declare she was the one. Then she received social and emotional healing as well as the physical. Jairus went along with Jesus after being told the girl was dead. He pressed past the mocking mourners; he persevered when it looked impossible.

4. **Faith is impelled** by desperation that Jesus is sufficient to meet the need one has. Sometimes we have to get to the point where it matters more to reach Jesus than whatever the fear or embarrassment or other countering force is. Desperation is what took these two to him; sometimes it is what gets us to the place of committed trust in Jesus to meet the need.

Most of us have needs for ourselves or those dear to us. Can we learn from Jairus to come firmly but humbly to ask for help? Can we grasp hold of him as he passes – because it is only in him that we have hope? Can we be active in our faith. Go, fall down, grasp hold, walk with him? Some people find in healing prayer it is as the person starts to do what they couldn't do before that they are healed. Take action in faith.

Then it gets harder when people mock, our expectation pours away like sand in a sieve. Do we persist then? What about when the symptoms have gone away and they start to try to return. Will we persist or give up? Faith holds on tight knowing that there is often a battle to keep the answers to prayer which God has given us.