

Homily for people and parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 30th June 2024, Pentecost 6

Readings: 2Samuel 1:1, 17-27

Psalm 130

2Corinthians 8: (1-6) 7-15

Mark 5:21-43

In the Gospel reading today we heard about two people who came to Jesus, with the hope that through him a need in their lives would be met. When we consider who they were, how they approached Jesus, and what his response was... I think we'll find gold!

Jesus had calmed a storm on the journey across the lake and as word of this spread, we can assume that many people would have been curious and many filled with hope. The Gospel writer tells us that a leader of the synagogue came to Jesus and implored him to come and heal his daughter. In response Jesus started to go with him and the crowd followed to see what would happen. It's worth remembering that the man clearly had status in his community for he was male – in a culture that regarded women as less than men – and he was a leader in the local synagogue. Because of this his name is recorded, and we understand that his name was Jairus.

That's not to say that there wouldn't have been some risk for Jairus in his request, because Jesus was a controversial figure who had challenged conventional wisdom about who, and what, was important to God. But, as a father, desperate for his daughter to be healed, he risked the unkind words of others and made his request.

As Jesus walked to the house of Jairus the crowd apparently jostled to be close to this controversial figure who claimed the authority of God. In the midst of this crowd we are told that a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years worked her way through to be close to Jesus, and without asking for permission touched his cloak.

Unlike Jairus this woman had no status in her community, so her name is not recorded. Because of her bleeding this woman would have been considered ritually unclean, so we can assume that this woman had been denied contact with other people of her community for some time and had a lonely existence. In addition, the Gospel suggests that the woman had spent all of her money trying to be healed, so she was now broke!

It was a risky thing for the woman to come into the crowd for had she been recognised she could be dragged away and beaten. For the woman to go into the crowd and deliberately touch a Jewish man she was risking her life... and yet she did it.

When the woman touched him, Jesus felt power leave him, and the woman had a sense of being immediately healed. Imagine her joy and relief as she made her way to go, and then her terror when Jesus asked the crowd repeatedly, 'Who touched me?'

The woman then demonstrated great courage because she admitted what she had done to Jesus straight away and shared with him her story. To the surprise of everyone Jesus did not judge, reject, or condemn the woman for her action, but, said instead, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” He used the language of family by calling her ‘daughter’ and asked that she go in peace.

This is a powerful encounter to consider for by implication whenever we feel unclean or unworthy – there appears to be the promise of healing and blessing when we come to Jesus. But, there is also the challenge for us to think about who we judge to be unworthy. How does the response of Jesus to the woman surprise us? Could the grace of God be significantly bigger, and less conditional, than we thought?

If this dramatic encounter was not enough the Gospel goes on to tell us that some people then came and explained to Jairus that his daughter had died. However, Jesus reassured Jairus and they continued to the house.

When they got to the house Jesus went to the girl’s room and taking her by the hand he said in Aramaic, ‘Little girl, get up!’ And then, the impossible happened... the girl got up! The girl got up and Jesus asked the family to give her something to eat... as though nothing strange had happened at all!

There are many people who will taste ashes when they read or hear about this miracle, because they grieve the loss of their own children. When they prayed, with all their heart and mind, ‘My child, get up!’ Or, ‘My child, be well!’ their prayers were not answered in the way that they hoped. One of the greatest griefs any parent can carry is the death of a child... and I think there are no adequate answers for the human experience of some prayers being answered the way we hope, and some not been answered in this way.

However, for Jairus and his family... there could only have been joy.

Having gained some clarity about why Jairus and the nameless woman came to Jesus, and what they received in response, it’s worth asking ourselves: why we keep coming to Jesus in worship, and what we receive through this? I encourage you to think about it, and even write your responses down, so that the next time somebody asks – Why do you go to church? Or, why do you believe in God? we can each have a better sense of how to reply. May God’s Spirit guide us as we consider and respond to these questions.

For now, let’s close with prayer:

Holy God we give thanks for the gift of our lives, and your love, and we thank you for the way that Jesus brought healing and hope to those considered least in his society. In your mercy, please give us the grace and the will to do the same. We pray in the name of the one who said, ‘*Little girl, get up!*’ Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**