

Sermon on Sunday 30 June 2024

by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader

Readings: Psalm 130 & Mark 5. 21-end



Leaving the door open

Hello, everyone. How are you today?

If your first inclination is to say, 'I'm fine', then you are a part of the majority of people who, when asked if they are okay, say fine or okay! Sometimes pleasantries or basic facts about past or coming events are exchanged but the question itself is never answered, and not explored.

Sometimes what we say doesn't reflect what is going on inside. We may suggest meeting for coffee or resolve to make a phone call but it doesn't quite happen.

Today's Gospel is all about the time when saying, 'I'm fine', is not an option and we are almost driven into reaching out. We have two people meeting Jesus. These meetings are not the type noted on the calendar. They are not planned, considered conversations, instead they take place out of desperation, even as a last resort. There is no complex faith, rather Jesus represents a glimmer of a hope.

Jairus' daughter is very ill and he is desperate for her to survive. He navigates his way through the crowd, repeatedly begs Jesus to help and falls at his feet. Jesus agrees to come, gets waylaid talking with the woman who touches his cloak, meanwhile messengers arrive to tell Jairus that his daughter has already died. He chooses to listen to Jesus, and, on reaching his house, ignores the ridicule of those gathered, and takes Jesus into the centre of his home. He keeps opening the door to Jesus and Jesus walks right into the heart of that family.

The woman had heard about Jesus, too. Her society forbids women, especially unmarried or unaccompanied women, being with men outside their family, let alone a male rabbi in a public place. Furthermore, having bled not each month but continually for years, she has been ostracised by religious rules of purity - not able to share a bed, furniture or cooking utensils. Despite having low self-esteem and fearful of those around her, in desperation she touches his outer garment thinking that just one touch may well be enough. On feeling the power leave him, he turns round and the woman falls at his feet and tells the whole truth; she opens her heart to Jesus and he steps in.

For both, it is a time when social conventions, personal reticence and religious expectations are flung aside. It is in the reaching out, the stepping towards, the expression of the deepest

emotion showing honesty, that the individual meets Jesus. There is a connection: they fall at Jesus' feet. They spill out their very selves and Jesus fills that space and is able to work in their lives. They recognise a dependence, a need for God's mercy and his spirit in the world. We do not know how but, they will be changed by these experiences.

We, too, may have moments of connection: praying for a birth and the health of a mother and baby; being overcome by the vastness, beauty or power of nature; uncertainty and fear around ill health and witnessing the moment of death; being gripped by the inhumanity of humanity or watching the glaciers melt and the animals burn in the wildfires. We are driven by the narrative of events and our own needs. Feelings and thoughts tend to move from the inside to the outside; censoring of words and conforming behaviour take a back seat; words may even disappear altogether replaced by tears and noises. We may fall silent and time seems to stand still - for a moment we are completely in the moment (even if we feel out of it). We might feel as if we are falling but at these very moments the spiritual door is ajar. We call out to God from the deep, connectivity is restored and we are made whole again.

As we pick up a daily routine, the conformity, the holding back, a lack of willingness to open up slowly returns. It sounds daft after all, how can we not be open with a God who already knows us inside out.

It's because we can find it difficult to acknowledge our own feelings and continue down the path of our own choice. Our prayers can become the equivalent of exchanging the time of day with God. Again, I am not advocating for one way of praying over another here. We can be telling him: I'm fine. Life is okay.

Even sitting in silence, we can be 'avoiding' God.

Remember, Jesus encourages daily prayer (Matthew 6. 7-13) and Paul in the letter of to the Ephesians (6. 18) reminds us to pray at all times. God wants us to come closer and share our lives with him; it is only by telling it how it is, acknowledging our weaknesses and recognising our dependence upon God that we are strengthened; we so need his gifts of grace, given through Jesus of hope and forgiveness, we so need the encouragement and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

We should not be shy to pray:

I don't know what I should say or which words to use, help me to pray,

Just Wow Lord! Thankyou!

I'm finding it difficult – life is blocking you out,

I feel too drained to pray, I don't seem to know anything at all,

I'm hurting and angry,

I just need to sit/walk for a while, please hold me and be my strength for the day, guide me when you think I am ready.

Faith – Trust in God and taking that walk with his Son is not a constant; the tank is not always full; the car is rarely fully charged. And so, we develop the habit of leaving the door ajar-waiting, making space and room, listening, trusting, reaching out and connecting.

I encourage us all to find a quiet space and read afresh Matthew 6. 7-15.