

Sermon on Sunday 27 June 2021

by Geoff Oates, Lay Reader

Mark 5. 21-43

A story of two people, one named, one nameless. From opposite ends of what today we might call the spectrum of privilege. Two people who come to Jesus, as the words of the Psalm have it, out of the very depths of their despair, and who receive greater blessings that they had dared to ask or hope for. The story is retold in their own words, firstly those of Jairus:

Jairus

Life was going so well for me. The job was fine. My religious life was blossoming. They've made me an elder at the Synagogue. They all respect my piety and my adherence to the Law. And a lovely, thriving family to go home to at the end of the day. Everyone could see how God was blessing me. My name was spoken with respect by everyone in town!

And now this. Little Ruth. She was always my special joy. And, of course, she's not so little anymore. She's 12 now, on the threshold of womanhood. We were starting to plan the coming of age ceremonies. And we'd have no problems finding a good husband for her. A wonderful adult life ahead of her. And now this. Nobody can tell us what's wrong with her. She's seen all the doctors, they sell me expensive medicines but she just gets weaker and weaker.

The elders have said the usual prayers for her but there's no change. It's God's will, they say. What have we done to deserve

this? Has little Ruth done anything to displease God? Have I committed some great sin? I fear there are people sniggering behind my back. "That Jairus bloke, maybe he's not so 'respectable' as he makes out...."

I've heard a lot about this Jesus. Healing people. Driving out evil spirits. But the other elders don't like him. Sure, he can draw a crowd, but what sort of crowd? It's like a travelling medicine show. Tax collectors and sinners, beggars and outcasts. Not the sort of people I'd want to be seen with... but my daughter is dying...

Did I, Jairus, really do that? Throw myself in the dirt at the feet of an itinerant preacher. And just about everyone in town was there to see it. No time to fix a discreet appointment, no time to explain who I was and all the things I did for God. And he didn't ask. We just set off to my house. Like he knew there wasn't a second to lose.

And then this woman gets in the way...

The woman

I'd heard about Jesus, too. How he seems to care about the people that THEY don't want to know about. Of course, THEY don't think much of women anyway. And then there's my little problem, isn't there. **Little?** Twelve years I've been like this. It was bad enough when it was just a few days each month. At least all we women had to put up with that together. And THEY would say we were 'unclean' in God's eyes and wouldn't have us anywhere near them.

Once a month was bad enough, but these twelve years it's been all the time. The pain, the embarrassment, the steady loss of hope as all the savings went on useless doctors' bills. But the worst was being an outcast from my own religion. Unclean. And yet I never really felt that God had abandoned me. I'm a daughter of Israel, too, you know. He made me in His image... and then Jesus comes to town.

It was a bit of a risk, just joining the crowd. I kept my veil over my face and hoped nobody would recognise me. If they thought I'd even brush against their clothes they'd have driven me away – that would have made **them** unclean, too, wouldn't it? And they'd have had to go and have a bath before they could say their prayers!

And I couldn't speak to him. I wouldn't dare. Anyway, you don't want to be talking about women's troubles with a strange man. But maybe, if I could just push through the crowd, invisible and nameless, and touch the hem of his coat, this time it would work the other way. His cleanness, his purity would rub off on me. That's all I wanted.

And then it all went wrong. He **knew**. He turned and saw me. One veiled face in that heaving crowd. I wished the ground would swallow me! Was he angry? Did he want to rebuke me? But I understand now. A wordless, anonymous healing might be all I wanted, but it's not enough for Jesus. He wanted to **know** me, to acknowledge **me** before the crowd. He called me 'Daughter' and gave me his blessing of peace. This was more than healing, this was restoration. I was no longer unwanted, no longer invisible, no longer on the outside. My faith, my trust in

him, frightened and desperate as I was, was enough to give me new life.

Jairus

I was angry. Who was she, a woman, to get in the way now, when every second was vital? Didn't Jesus realise how ill my Ruth was? And even as we waited, impatient to continue on our way, the messengers came. My lovely girl was dead. The healer was too late. No need to bother him anymore, there are plenty of other people here to make demands on him. People who can still hope.

But what's this? As we begin the sorrowful walk home to start the funeral preparations, Jesus walks with us. As if nothing has happened. "Just believe," he tells me. Believe what? It felt like a cruel joke.

She wasn't 'only sleeping'. We're not daft, we can tell when someone is dead. Was that another cruel joke? But we followed him anyway. Full of doubt and pain, we followed him anyway, into the room where she lay. Maybe that's what he meant by 'believe'. Even when it makes no sense, go with him anyway. And it was good to get away from the crowd. Just the family and a couple of his friends. Almost like the whole thing wasn't worth a fuss. No big prayers, no laying on of hands, no big incantations and appeals to God. He just took her hand and raised her up.

"Get her some lunch." Life's routine begins again, just like that. But, of course, it is all so different. I offered my pride and my

reputation in the hope of healing. Jesus took them, not as a gift to treasure, but as a burden to be lifted from me, and in return He gave my Ruth resurrection. And He gave me resurrection.

When I love my own daughter so much, when I see how much God loves my daughter, how can I now look down on any daughter of God. I wonder who she was, that blessed woman who shared that vital moment of my life. I don't even know her name. She deserves a name.

