

Jesus responds to need and hope, not power and influence

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Pentecost + 5b – Mark 5.21-43 – 27-6-21

Jesus and his friends are in the boat again, on their way back to the Galilean side. Today's weather's calm, but he's about to encounter a frenetic press of ministry; an onrush of need. Everyone wants his attention. Verse 21 literally says 'a large crowd gathered *epi auton* against him'. He's pinned between the crowd and the shore.

Today's focus is the ministry Jesus has with two women. Mark takes one story, the story of Jairus' daughter, splits it apart, and puts the story of the courageous woman in the middle. Weaving the two stories together this way heightens the tension. The frustration Jairus experiences when Jesus is delayed from attending to his daughter wouldn't be nearly as intense without the story of the woman who butts in and seizes her own healing. Competing priorities and the delay are core to this narrative. Everyone vies for Jesus's attention; who'll get it; who'll have to wait?

As Jesus steps out of the boat, he's pinned between the crowds and the seashore. Then Jairus arrives, one of the leaders of the synagogue. The crowds make enough space for Jairus to fall at Jesus's feet, and he begs Jesus many times. '*My little daughter is near death. Come and lay your hands on her so that she may be saved and live*'. Jesus goes with Jairus; everyone else must wait for this little daughter.

But the crowds don't give up. They keep pressing in on Jesus, to have their piece of him. A woman comes up close behind Jesus – '*If only I touch his clothes, I'll be saved.*' She's been losing blood for twelve years, with the cramping, the

anaemia and the exhaustion that go with it. Every doctor has failed her; she's spent all she has. Now, ritually unclean, no one will go near her if they can help it. She's a courageous woman even to get up in the morning. She's a courageous woman to push through the tiredness and pain to get out there to see Jesus; courageous to ignore the pressure to keep away from the crowds and from Jesus. And when she's manoeuvred herself into position and managed to touch Jesus' clothes, she's wonderfully courageous not to melt away into the crowd and hide for shame.

So the touch happens. The power goes out from Jesus, and he knows it. He looks around and asks who did it. She comes forward in fear and trembling – emotions appropriate to a divine encounter – and she falls at his feet like Jairus did. And now this courageous woman pours out her whole story to Jesus. Such a story takes time, and Jesus gives her the gift of his time; gives her his full attention. What do you imagine Jairus going through right now?

At the end of her long account, Jesus calls her *Daughter*, restoring her to kinship and community as a Daughter of Israel. He says her healing is an outworking of her own remarkable faith. Then Jesus gives her a benediction: *Go in peace*. And finally, he gives her what she'd first taken without permission; '*be healed of your disease*'. Her shame is taken away. She's restored to life and community.

But suddenly, while he's still speaking, people from Jairus' house arrive and interrupt: '*Your daughter has died. Why annoy the teacher any longer?*' But Jesus, paying no attention to what they say, tells Jairus, '*Don't be afraid; just believe.*'*

That's the big challenge for Jairus. For someone used to being in control – being obeyed – his encounter with Jesus has been incredibly disempowering. Couldn't Jesus just let the woman have her healing and go quickly and quietly? If he'd not wasted all that time listening to her, there might still have

been time for his little daughter. Jairus must fear that he'd missed the last moments of his daughter's life on a wild goose chase. * In this moment, he's poised between helplessness, despair and a glimmer of hope. He can't control this situation. He goes with Jesus.

When they arrive, the mourning is in full swing. But Jesus says '*Why are you distressed and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep*'. The father and mother, and Jesus and his companions, enter the room where the child is. There are very few instances where the Gospels preserve a word or two in Aramaic, Jesus's heart language. Here's a precious moment where we glimpse Jesus gently addressing the girl directly in Aramaic: Taking her by the hand, '*Talitha koum,*' '*little girl, arise.*'

Mark only reveals at this point that the girl was not an infant or young child at all, but in Jesus's day she was a girl of nearly marriageable age, which was twelve and a half. Only now do we start to see links between this girl and the courageous woman: the twelve years of age and the twelve years of bleeding; the entry into womanhood contrasting the trials of mature womanhood; the attentive, perhaps even stifling family of the girl, as opposed to the woman's lack of any family.

There's a lot to take in once this key is handed to us. And I'll leave that to you to explore. But for now, when we face the epidemic of coercive control that plagues intimate relationships across our country, and even more within our Anglican church, let's remember today what happened for Jairus when he let go of his power to follow Jesus. He had to learn not to be afraid, but to believe. And in both stories, Jesus responded not to power and influence, but to need and hope.

Amen