

Sermon

28 June 2015

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: Mark 5:21-43

To some degree, we all have challenges or difficulties to face. And although we almost always view these things negatively, in some way these things make us who we are.

Imagine a Moses without an Egypt,
a Daniel without a lion's den,
a David without a Goliath...

Hard to do, isn't it? The challenges and difficulties these people had to face, *made* them who they were. And if it wasn't for these adversities, we might not even have known about them at all!

The one similarity we find in all these 3 people's life stories, is that although they had difficult choices to make and they faced all kinds of hardship, God was with them all the time. They never had to do any of this alone.

Our Bible lesson today is also about people who faced adversity. It's a story within a story – 2 completely different stories of 2 completely different people, both in difficult situations, who knew that Jesus would have the answers to their problems.

The setting for this story is similar to that of most stories about Jesus' teaching and healing people. There was a large crowd of people around him, eager to hear his words or to be healed by him.

Then somebody important came up to Jesus. We know that he was an important person, because his name and position in society is mentioned – Jairus, one of the synagogue rulers.

His daughter was dying and he heard that Jesus could heal people, so he humbled himself before Jesus and begged him to go heal his daughter. That's not something important people ever did in that society, but if your child is dying, nothing will stop you from doing whatever it takes to save them.

Jesus could see how distressed this man was, and went with him straight away. With the crowd following.

In that crowd was somebody else who had also heard that Jesus could heal people. She had a disease that ostracised her from the community. She was unclean and not allowed in that crowd, but she was desperate, and decided to risk it.

She's been unwell for 12 years, more than a quarter of the lifespan of the average person in those days. She believed that if she could just touch Jesus, she would be healed.

And she was right. Jesus felt power going out of him and stopped to see what happened. The woman, who was not an important person, because her name is not mentioned, and didn't have a man fending for her like the wee dying girl's dad was doing for her; knew she didn't have a choice but to come clean.

But she was scared. The crowds had the right to throw stones at her; she wasn't supposed to be there in the first place; and now she had contaminated Jesus by touching him.

But Jesus didn't tell her off, like she thought he would. He looks at her and says: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Jesus calls her "daughter" – including her, who was an outcast in society up until a few minutes ago, in the family of God. Jesus didn't only give her back her health, he also restored her place in society and gave meaning to her life again.

While this was the biggest and most amazing moment in this woman's life, it soon turned out to be the worst moment of Jairus' life. Messengers came to say that it was too late – his daughter died. If Jesus had just ignored that woman and kept walking, time wouldn't have run out for the wee girl.

I cannot imagine what that man must have felt like at that moment... He was so close, but now all his efforts were in vain. His daughter was dead, they didn't get to her in time.

But Jesus wasn't distressed about this at all. He said: "Don't be afraid, just believe."

When they reached Jairus' house, the mourners were already crying outside, but Jesus told them not to cry just yet, she was only asleep. This made them laugh in his face – one of the worse insults you could give someone in the 1st century world.

But Jesus just went in, took her hand – which would again make him unclean, because you were not allowed to touch a dead body - and told her to get up.

Which she did.

A miracle. And then Jesus also restored her place in society, by telling her parents to give her something to eat. That would show all the bystanders that she was really okay and part of the community again.

So – a story within a story.

And the story *behind* the story is that the people who moved in Jairus' circles viewed Jesus with suspicion. Jesus knew this, and still said yes to healing his daughter. None of those people would even spend a minute trying to make a nobody like the sick woman's life better, so Jesus taught them that nobody is more important in the eyes of God than anybody else. God has time for *everyone*.

By allowing the girl to die and then to wake her up, Jesus *showed* the people who didn't trust him that God was working through him, and that God can do *anything*.

The sick woman crossed a boundary; she risked her life, but in the end that saved her.

In healing the wee girl Jesus crossed a boundary; and in the end it saved her. Jesus was trying to show the people of his time that God is bigger than rules and regulations; that he can reach beyond and above what we can imagine.

And that is still true today.

We sometimes ask God for things, like Jairus, and then we get frustrated because it feels as if he isn't listening, because nothing is changing. But that is just because we have a very limited perspective.

God knows what he is doing. On the way to our problem, so to speak, he might be dealing with someone else's problem first. That doesn't mean for one second that he forgot about us. For all we know, he might just have a miracle in store for us...

We need to be patient, trust God, and believe that he can do anything. Actually, not long after he healed that woman and girl, he did something life changing for us – he died on the cross to set us free from sin and death. Talking about miracles!

He did that for every single one of us, no matter where we find ourselves in the crowd – desperate to be close to him, or just hanging around the edges, unsure whether we really want to be there or not.

In dying on the cross Jesus changed things around, instead of us having to go to him, he came to *us*.

He chose *us*. All of us.

Whether we are important people, or living on the fringes of society.

Whether we have small problems, or big ones.

He came to us, and he gives meaning to our lives. He makes us members of the family of God, gives us a place where we belong, and where we can feel safe, even in times we have to face difficulties.

God promised to, through Jesus and his Holy Spirit, never leave us alone. Never.

And you know what? I think that *that* is the miracle. Not the healing, as such, but the fact that God is holding our hands on our journeys through life, helping us to make sense of what is happening to us. *If* this brings about healing, that is just a bonus.

Sometimes he answers our prayers straight away, sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes he heals us, sometimes he doesn't. But the fact that we will never have to deal with illness, worries, loneliness, problems, or questions by ourselves, that's the miracle.

So in your pain and suffering, in your struggles and hardships, remember: you are not alone. Jesus already came to you. And he won't leave without changing you.

Sometimes he'll change your situation, sometimes he'll only change your perspective. Just don't ever doubt him, because he knows what he is doing.

The unwell woman knew that; Jairus got to learn that; Moses knew that; Daniel knew that; David knew that.

Your illness might be your Egypt, your worries about your future or your family might be your lion's den, your bereavement might be your Goliath. We all face different challenges and difficulties all through our lives, but through all this, God promises to *always* be there.

What more can we ask for?

Amen