



27 June 2021
Fourth Sunday
after Trinity
Michael Brown



Gospel Reading: Mark 5: 21-43: A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

The visiting preacher spoke fluently for some twenty minutes and then paused for breath. Several members of the congregation mistook this for the conclusion of proceedings and reached for their hymn books only to have their hopes dashed when the preacher continued, ‘That concludes my introduction, now for the five main points of my sermon’.

Mark the gospel writer would have sympathised with this congregation. He didn’t like introductions short, long or otherwise. He didn’t want to set the scene. He wanted to start the action. And so the opening verse of his gospel is: *‘The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’*. No family tree like Matthew, no mention of other writers as in Luke, and no cosmic background as in John.

But Mark does like ‘sandwich’ stories¹ which he uses to ratchet up the action. Jesus sets off to cure Jairus’ little girl but his journey is interrupted by a woman seeking a cure for herself by desperate means. This heightens the tension. The audience began by asking themselves: Will Jesus cure the girl? Now they are asking: Will the girl be dead before Jesus arrives? It may seem strange to use the word ‘audience’, shouldn’t it be ‘congregation’ but in fact both may be correct.

¹ Drafted before reading Fr Mike’s sermon for Trinity 1.

Mark's gospel probably originated in Rome where it was read out in the various house churches before being copied to the wider early church. In Roman society there was an accepted skill of public performance by trained orators. The style of Mark's gospel would make it well suited to this type of reading whether in a religious or a secular setting. The orator would use techniques of voice and gesture to enliven the reading. A public performance outside of a 'church' setting could well be an unobtrusive form of evangelism.

Even today in our non-oral culture, simply reading Mark's gospel straight through in a group setting can be an extremely beneficial exercise only taking something like an hour and a quarter to complete. As the reading proceeds the dramatic tension can be felt rising until the mysterious conclusion is reached.

The yawning two thousand year cultural gap makes it very difficult for us to grasp how brave was the woman suffering from haemorrhages. She was not just afflicted with any chronic illness but with one which (on the prevailing assumptions) rendered her ritually unclean. That is to say, she was suffering both physically and spiritually. We might say that she was ill but she wasn't allowed the comfort of going to church. In her desperation she was proposing not just to approach in public any man but one who was a devout teacher. We may think that she was being superstitious in aiming to touch Jesus' garments but clothes were regarded as an extension of the personality.

The woman touches Jesus and is healed. But what follows is perhaps even more amazing. Jesus *actively* seeks out the person who has literally contacted him. He *turns* around, he *looks* all around. The disciples make excuses but Jesus persists. The woman comes forward hesitantly but then Jesus calls her, 'Daughter'. Jesus has recognised her as a disciple. The verse '*Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near*' (Is. 55:6) has both been fulfilled and also turned around. She has sought healing and she has found salvation. The Lord has sought her and he has found her. In the gospels the same word is used for healing as for salvation.

That famous Geordie Cardinal Basil Hume was once speaking to a packed church. He said something like this. ‘How many people are here tonight? As far as God is concerned, there is only one, that is, God looks at each of us one at a time.’

HYMN INTERLUDE

NEH 376: ‘I heard the voice of Jesus say’ Words: Horatius Bonar (1808-89) Tune: Kingsfold (R Vaughan Williams)	
<p>1. I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘Come unto me and rest; Lay down, thou weary one, lay down Thy head upon my breast:’ I came to Jesus as I was, Weary, and worn, and sad; I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.</p>	<p>2. I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘Behold, I freely give The living water, thirsty one; Stoop down and drink and live:’ I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream. My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, And now I live in him.</p>
<p>3. I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘I am this dark world’s Light; Look unto me, thy morn shall rise, and all thy day be bright:’ I looked to Jesus, and I found in him my Star, my Sun; and in that light of life I’ll walk till travelling days are done.</p>	<p>(Horatius Bonar wrote many hymns. He was originally a minister in the Church of Scotland. In 1843 he joined the Free Church of Scotland. Somewhat ironically many of the churches belonging to this denomination sang only Psalms and no hymns.)</p>

Concluding Reflections

The Church Times for 04 June had an interview with Dr J V Peter (Professor of Critical Care Medicine at Christian Medical College, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India) in

which he said, *'What really makes me happy is when I see someone who - in all standard medical terms - is an unsalvageable patient survive their critical illness and go home. I have witnessed several miracles in my medical career'*.

In the 'standard medical terms' of his day, the young girl was dead and it was pointless for Jesus to bother going to see her. Now some people will state that miracles simply do not happen and that is the end of the matter. More generously, other people may wonder whether the young girl was simply in a coma. Either way, unless we reject the gospel accounts as complete fiction, it has to be accepted that Jesus did many astounding things. And what the leader of the synagogue, the chronically ill woman and the people who work at CMC have in common is faith. Perhaps it is only in faith drenched contexts that people can see miracles, in which case, there may be many more around us than first meet our eyes.

Prayers for Healing²

Lord, grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured or disabled, that they may be made whole. *Hear us, Lord of life.*

Grant to all who are lonely, anxious or depressed a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence. *Hear us, Lord of life.*

Sustain and support those who seek your guidance and lift up all who are brought low by the trials of this life. *Hear us, Lord of life.*

Grant to all who minister to those who are suffering, wisdom and skill, sympathy and patience. *Hear us, Lord of life.*

We make these prayers in the name of your Son Jesus Christ who came to bring healing and salvation. **AMEN**

² Adapted from *Common Worship*