

Reflection for Pentecost 5 by Megan Cambridge (Lay Reader)

Mark's gospel resembles the edited highlights of Jesus life and ministry, His greatest hits. It's short, fast-paced, and to the point. In our fast-paced, 21st century world, this story within a story might not seem that odd, but in the slower beat of the 1st century world it conveys a sense of urgency and frenetic energy. Just because it is fast paced and to the point does not, however, mean it's simple. It has layers, like the rest of the Bible. On the face of it, it's simple enough for a child, yet it is so deep we'll never reach the bottom. Our passage today has layers, like a sandwich. It has two stories in one and it's a master class in faith.

Someone once asked Billy Graham what Biblical faith is. He said first, 'you must believe that God exists, and that he loves you so much that he sent Jesus to save you. Second, you must trust wholly in Christ's salvation, put your life into his hands, and believe Jesus not only can save you but will save you.' Biblical faith is not a leap in the dark. It's not hoping something is there on the other side to catch you. Biblical faith is a complete trust in the trustworthy God who is there and who is not silent.

In the passage from Mark's gospel, we see how faith took Jairus from a life of fear to peace. We see how faith took the woman from a life of suffering to healing. But faith does more than just make us feel better. It connects us to Jesus.

We know life isn't easy and awful things can happen. In the case of Jairus, we are told he was 'one of the rulers of the synagogue'. He was a community leader. Everyone knew him. He was well-off. He probably didn't need a lot from others. Then his daughter is taken ill and she grows worse and worse until she is at the point of death. When he is aware of Jesus in the neighbourhood and looks at his dying twelve-year-old daughter he decides to run to Jesus for help. He falls at Jesus feet and says, 'My little daughter is at the point of death.' It is an urgent plea. She is at death's door and they are preparing for the final moments. He needs Jesus' help **right now**. 'Jesus, will you help me?' Jesus does not respond with words but demonstrates His compassion for Jairus by immediately following him home. They don't travel alone but with the ever-present crowd that follows Jesus.

Out of the crowd rushes another desperate petitioner; the suffering woman. Her complaint has persisted for 12 years making her ceremonially unclean, preventing her from worshiping in the temple, making her a social outcast. Even if she was once well-to-do, she's now destitute. She's financially crippled from doctors' bills and still no better. She's tried all medicine has to offer and suffered not only from the disease but also from the cures and she is desperate for an end to it. She sees the crowd coming her way along the street, and Jesus, whom she has heard about, is among them. She thinks, 'He can help me.' So begins the story within a story. Despite the urgency of His journey to Jairus' house Jesus acknowledges the woman and her faith.

In both cases, their circumstances were beyond their control. Both were at breaking point. Both desperate for help beyond what this world could offer. Their circumstances, crashing on top of them, summoned something from within. Perhaps this was something that surprised each of them, something that led them to turn towards Jesus, whom they believed had what they needed. Their circumstances summoned a faith that even they probably were previously unaware of. They came to Jesus, trusting Him for something everyone else was powerless to do.

That's the beginning of biblical faith—simply looking at Jesus as One who can help, and coming to Jesus for that help. For some people it takes overwhelming circumstances before they are ready to come. For them it can be about becoming desperate enough to come to Jesus. It's letting go of pride. It's saying, finally, 'I just don't have what it takes. I can't do this. I need help. But I need a kind of help this world can't offer.'

In directing the woman's faith, Jesus was directing the faith of the disciples and of Jairus and of us. That's why she appears when she does. Can't you just imagine how frustrated the disciples were that Jesus stopped and took time to heal her? Think about how anxious Jairus would have been knowing every second counted. And Jesus stops to deal with the woman! He knew his daughter was dying and Jesus is being distracted. Jairus knew time was short and it was indeed, as we learn from verse 35. *'While he [Jesus] was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"'* Jesus' delay caused the girl's death! How

Jairus' heart must have broken. Why did Jesus delay?

Looking deeper at the text we can see Jesus was teaching something about Himself that Jairus couldn't see otherwise, that the disciples couldn't see otherwise, that even we can't see otherwise. God works His own time line. The Bible says over and over again that we must wait on the Lord. Why? Because God's clock doesn't work like ours! We're impatient. He is not. We want now but He knows what we need and sometimes it takes a long time for us to realize that. As the song says, 'You can't hurry love' and the Bible says God is love. We can't hurry Him, though we may want to. We just have to wait.

I think this passage poses two questions for us to take away and reflect upon;

Who or what claims our attention and time and how do we determine the worthiness of those people or things? Jesus' example makes it clear that those most deserving may be the least visible ones; the female child despite her father's importance and the woman, not amongst the most highly regarded in her social context. Both women are deprived of power but Jesus sees their need and deems them as worthy of His time and attention as anyone else. What does it mean to be healed? Both stories have happy endings but that is not always the reality of life. Not even our most earnest pleas always result in the answers we desire. How do we hold our faith when miracles do not occur? Every person of faith who suffers such as the woman in the story and parents of suffering children pray for the possibility of miraculous healing, but dramatic physical healing is rarely the response to those prayers. Pray as we may, not all prayers are answered as we pray them. What is more, often the healing is peace, acceptance and the awareness of the presence of God in our times of despair. Beyond physical healing, acceptance, intimacy and touch can make us whole and give us peace.