Lay service talk Sunday 27th June, 21 Year B Trinity 4 by Sue Ward

**Mark 5:21-43**

As we have heard in today’s Gospel there were two very sad stories, one about a young girl just coming into adulthood and an older woman who had spent all of her adult life ill and classed as unclean. One is rich from a very privileged background, her parents were devastated by her condition and prepared to do anything to help her they had exhausted all of the traditional cures. Her Father, as ruler of the synagogue was powerful and important so would have had every resource at his disposal so how desperate was he to approach a wandering preacher for help?

The older lady had spent most of her adult life suffering. She had spent all of her money trying to cure her problem. She should not have been out of her house, she was classed as unclean and forbidden to have contact with anyone as they would also have been contaminated and outcast. Does that remind you of anything in our lives today? I am not just thinking of Covid but other people are outcasts in our society because of gender, race, sexual orientation, culture, language and physical disability and I am sure you can think of other barriers.

There are marked differences in the approaches to Jesus as well. The young girl’s Father, who is called Jairus approaches and throws himself at the feet of Jesus, this proud man of impeccable standing and power. He had no idea how he would be received but he put aside his personal prejudice, he put aside his pride and begged for the saving of his daughter’s life, she was at the point of death. How caught up in his grief that he would abandon his social standing and beg from this itinerant preacher.

The older woman on the other hand knew she would not be accepted in society, she had no power, no one to act as advocate for her. She has lost everything over the years, any money she might have had, any friends or family. She was on her own and knew she had to act to save herself and in doing so breaks all bounds of society by touching a man in public when she is an outcast and unclean.

Jesus had agreed to go to the house of Jairus and see his daughter, we are told that the crowds were immense and tightly packed and yet Jesus was still aware of the woman’s slight touch to his robe, he was aware that power had gone from him and it is then that he stops to speak to her and help her. Remember at this time it was very much a patriarchal society, women had no power, independence or choice but Jesus always showed respect to all women.

The older woman, who is not named felt that by just touching the robe of Jesus she would be healed and Jesus said to her “Daughter your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your disease.” All of this caused a delay and a message came telling Jairus that his daughter had died but Jesus’s answer to the Father is “Do not fear only believe.” He carries on to the house where the professional mourners are now in full flow but Jesus said “The child is not dead, only sleeping.” Which just provoked unbelief. Everyone was sent out of the house except the parents and then they went to the girl with Peter, James and John. Speaking in the local dialect that the girl would understand he told her to get up and holding his hand she rose from her bed.

Are these stories as simple as they seem or are they very carefully constructed to teach us by example? They are very carefully worked and demonstrate opposite ends of the spectrum for us. Although on his way to see the daughter of someone powerful and commanding he goes out of his way to take time with someone who has been completely shunned by society. He is taking time out to help the powerless.

Jesus spoke to those who were troubled or afflicted, he had time for them, and he ignored no one. This did not always lead to a straight way forward and he is calling us to do the same. To not ignore the insignificant and not just to talk about things but to do. To acknowledge this is something we have to do inside, to ourselves almost on an unconscious level. It is something we have to internalise this thing called faith.

We do not have a map to lead us, and all our journeys are different and they are our own and we have to decide that it is a journey worth taking for the rest of our lives. We can’t say I will do this when I have more money, more time, a better job. We can waste so much of our lives just waiting for the time to be right to acknowledge the power of Jesus and whether that risk is worth taking. We are not taking that journey blindly though as we will be given hope and life. Do you remember when Satnavs became available? It was an absolute revelation for me, I have always done a lot of driving and not always having someone to navigate journeys became interesting at times and now all I do is put an address into my phone and away we go. But and there is always a but, there are many people who follow these wonderful machines completely blindly. I remember reading stories of lorries and cars getting stuck in quite bizarre places because that is where the satnav told them to go. That is not the case with our faith, we have choice, we make that decision.

There are always times when we try to negotiate. When someone is very ill and we can say “I will be a better person”, “I will donate more”, “I will pray harder” but that is not what is required of us to receive hope and life and his love must prevail, the incoming tide is inevitable and even on the cross Jesus cried out for help before accepting the inevitable. Everything happens in God’s time. I heard Gerry Rafferty on the radio this, singing Baker Street. One line struck me in particular “One more year and then I will be Happy”

Are the miracles that were witnessed that day, created by faith or is faith created by their telling? Miracles can cause fear and amazement in people but God is leading us onwards. Do we all fully engage every Sunday? The ritual is familiar and comfortable and it is possible to float through the service, I know I have done it – sometimes it depends on how good the sermon is!! But, that but again we come in faith with all out frailties and as Jesus said “Your faith has made you well”

There were some children who were asked to stand in front of the congregation, they carried a boar each with just one word on it.

The first one steps forward and says “I am lonely only” the word on his board.

The second steps forward and says “I am all of a do” You have guessed it, the word on his board said Do. They touch hands do and only.

The third child steps forward. I am a negative he says joining hands with the others and the boards now read only do not.

The fourth child steps forward and he is believe but I find in hard he says.

The sentence is now “Only do not believe” which isn’t really what we have been talking about.

The last child steps forward and his board says fear and the rest of the children move away from him. I am good at scaring people he says.

The children return to the front and join hands, the boards they hold now says

“Do not fear only believe” Amen