

# Jesus, Healing and Time

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 30 June 2024

A Reflection by Allison Gentle

Pentecost 6B

**Mark 5: 21-43; Contemporary Reading: 'God, intimate and fearful' <sup>1</sup>**

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

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Does anyone remember a verse from an old hymn that starts: "*There's a wideness in God's mercy?*" Like the wideness of the sea? Today's gospel reading about the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus's daughter is a beautiful illustration of the breadth of God's readiness to heal, to restore, to redeem. Any boundaries that might present as obstacles are shown in this story to be transcended by God's infinite mercy, even the boundaries of time and space.

In this gospel story, sometimes called: *the miracle on the way to a miracle*, Jesus in his humanity is under time pressure. Unlike his divine parent, he can't be in two places at once. From the moment his boat reaches the shore, people surround him and Jairus is there begging Jesus repeatedly to hurry to the bedside of his daughter, whose death seems imminent. But before Jesus can reach Jairus's house, there is another request for his healing, this one a silent call from a silenced woman. She dare not ask for healing, she is an outcast, finding herself on the wrong side of the purity laws of her day through no choice of her own. So she seeks healing covertly, so convinced Jesus can heal her that she believes all she needs is to touch his clothing and she will be healed. It could be said that she steals healing power from Jesus under cover of anonymity.

The woman remains anonymous to this day. Her name has not been recorded. Like so many women in the gospels, she is identified by a prominent characteristic. Some are identified by their relationship to a male protector, as in Peter's mother-in-law, and Jairus's daughter. Others are identified by where they come from, like the Samaritan woman and the Syrophenician woman. The woman in this story is identified by her illness, like the crippled woman who couldn't stand straight. In the Catholic tradition, the haemorrhaging woman has been given the name Veronica, and she was made a saint. It was believed that she was the same woman who later gave Jesus a handkerchief to wipe his brow during his walk to the cross. The name Veronica comes from the words true image, because legend has it that when Jesus returned the handkerchief to her, it contained an image of his face. And her story contains a true image of Christ, and therefore a true image of God, mysterious as God may remain.

There are clear contrasts between the woman and the girl in this story. One is on the brink of becoming a woman, the other is a wounded veteran of womanhood. One has a powerful protector to plead for her, the other is apparently alone, and does not even feel entitled to ask for healing for herself. In Paul Kelly's phrase, she's a beggar on the street of love, trying to steal some healing without anyone noticing.

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<sup>1</sup> from All Desires Known by Janet Morley

But Jesus does notice. And he interrupts the urgent business of getting to Jairus's house to engage with the woman. This is curious. The healing has been done, he has a pressing engagement elsewhere, what is the purpose of delaying further to ask her to reveal herself? He asks, "*Who touched me?*" I always find it helpful to meditate on the questions Jesus asks people in the gospel stories. They are the questions Christ is still asking of us, and at different times a particular question can be a lamp for our feet.

Who touched me? Who is it that is coming to Christ for healing? What is your story? What is the condition for which you seek healing? What have you already endured in your efforts to end your suffering? How have your resources been depleted by your struggles? Jesus wants to hear the whole story. He has time.

The woman comes forward in fear and trembling, casts herself down at Jesus's feet, and tells him her story. It is presumably from this telling that Mark and other gospel writers have the details they give us about the nature and duration of her illness, and her financial ruin through unsuccessfully seeking cures. Jesus, already running late to heal Jairus's daughter, stops to listen to her life story, even though the healing has been done. Or has it? The language of time, the tenses, in this passage, are strange. When Jesus sees the woman and hears her story, he says "*Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.*" In that one statement he speaks of her healing as something that has happened and that is to happen. Even when healing is miraculous, it's a process, not a moment in time.

By addressing the woman as Daughter, he has brought her back into the community which has shunned her, and that dimension of healing is yet to fully unfold. She is not only telling Jesus her story, she is sharing it with her community. No doubt they have heard about her, but this might be the first time they have heard her story by her own account. She is sharing the vulnerability of her suffering and the joy of her healing. And Jesus is calling her Daughter.

Before Jesus has even finished speaking to the woman, news comes that Jairus's daughter has died. Jesus tells him, "*Do not fear, only believe.*" It could be said that Jesus is using the woman's faith as an example for Jairus, whose faith understandably wavered when he heard his daughter had died. This can be read in the context of the story in Mark shortly before this when Jesus rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith when their boat was caught in a storm on the sea of Galilee.

It has been suggested that part of the reason for nesting this story within the story of Jairus's daughter is to create an allegory of Jesus's message to the established Jewish religion of the day. Jairus was a leader of his synagogue, one of those who had accrued prestige and wealth, while creating out-groups through their purity laws. Jesus, by making Jairus wait while he heals and talks with a person of lower status, and further by holding her up to Jairus as an example of faith, could be showing Jairus that his faith institution is dying through its neglect of the poor and outcast, and it can only be restored to vitality by first showing mercy to the afflicted and marginalised. But there is hope. Jairus's daughter, his synagogue and his faith are not dead, but only sleeping. Now that the outcast has been healed and brought back into the faith community, Jairus's world can be healed too.

We see healing at several levels. There is inner healing: the woman formed the intention to seek healing, she acted on her intention, and she knows when she has been healed. There is healing that happens in relationship, between one through whom healing comes, and one who is healed. And there is the social level, between the healed person and their community.

This can be seen in Alcoholics Anonymous, still the most effective treatment for alcoholism. The only condition for membership is the sincere desire to stop drinking, the desire to be healed, and that can only happen within a person. The door to change opens from the inside. The alcoholic seeking recovery joins a group of others on the same journey, all at various stages in the process. Each one is assigned a sponsor, an experienced member of the group who is available to them for support, and with whom they form a close relationship. And part of the process is Step 9, making amends, when they seek to heal relationships within their wider community, relationships that have been fractured by the impacts of their alcoholism. A process of healing with its internal, relational and community dimensions.

Only when the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage is addressed on all these levels, does Jesus hasten to Jairus's house. According to worldly time, he is too late, the child has died. But in Kairos time, it is never too late. Jesus says the child is not dead, but only asleep. The near-death of the girl can be likened to the situation of people who give up hope when healing is delayed. Waiting starts to feel foolish, and it seems wiser to accept that healing won't come, and faith can be lost, a death of the spirit.

The importance of hope and faith is threaded through the story. Jairus says to Jesus with utter confidence, though his daughter is at the point of death, "*Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.*" The woman with the haemorrhage is so confident in Jesus' healing power that she is convinced all she needs to do is touch his cloak. Afterwards, Jesus tells her it is not him, but her faith that has made her well. When the people from Jairus's house come to tell him his daughter has died and there is no longer a need for Jesus to come, Jesus urges Jairus "*Do not fear, only believe.*"

The exchange between Jesus and the people at Jairus's house also underlines the importance of faith. They have understandably given up hope as it appears the child has died. When Jesus tells them they are mistaken, the child has not died, they laugh at him, so quickly can faith evaporate. Jesus simply sends the doubters outside and proceeds with his healing work.

As the girl gets up from her sickbed and walks around, the doubters are overcome with amazement, and the faith of the community is healed. The woman with the haemorrhage was not amazed, she fully expected to be healed, as long as she could touch Jesus' cloak. Once she had done that, she was healed, as she had expected. In both healings, Jesus invites the healed one back into their community. The woman with the haemorrhage is called "*Daughter,*" meaning part of the large family of the community of faith. When Jairus's daughter is healed, Jesus tells those who have gathered around her to give her something to eat, to be a community that nurtures vulnerable young people.

Faith never really dies, it only sleeps, waiting for the touch of Christ, and the divine voice saying *Little one, get up!* Healing starts with a person recognising their need of God, their need of healing. It continues with seeking healing through connection with Christ. Prayer is a way of touching the cloak of Jesus, the healing Spirit of Christ. Prayer expresses intention; connecting with Jesus the healer is an action that invites healing. Bringing our whole self to God through Christ, telling our stories even though we know God already knows them, speaking out of the unhealed places, counting the cost of our failed efforts to end our suffering – all this brings us into intimacy with God, through our connection with our high priest, Jesus our brother, Jesus the healer, Christ our saviour. And as we heal, we bring healing to our wider range of relationships, we find a more secure place in our families, our communities, a place built on honesty, openness and a recognition that our healing improves relationships with all those who our lives touch.

And finally, as church, we need to let ourselves be interrupted in our urgency to make our community better, to solve its problems, to heal its fevers. We need to let ourselves be interrupted by the need for healing of those on the margins: the poor, the homeless, the abused women, the mentally ill, the strange ones, the trauma-affected, the prisoners, the refugees, the outcasts of our day, those who have fallen foul of our present-day purity codes, the ones silently reaching out for a healing touch.

Our gospel story today tells us we will only be truly healed as a community when we look outwards to the need for healing in our wider world, and answer God's call to serve those Jesus called "*the least of these*," to listen to their stories.

May we find ways in our church community to be a place of healing for all those God puts in our way.

In the name of Christ, Amen.