

## YOU RAISE ME UP – REV'D CATHERINE EATON – SUNDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2009

**Readings: Ps 130      2 Cor 8.7-15      Mk 5.21-43**

I love the stories of today's gospel.

I love how Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, ignored the rules of his position to fall at Jesus' feet, begging him to come and heal his daughter. I love how he had to let go all he normally relied on to get what he needed.

And I love how the haemorrhaging woman, the unclean outcast, broke in on the mission of Jairus. Just when Jairus thought he had Jesus to himself, this mad woman gets in the way and holds things up. And so, too late, he learns his daughter is dead.

I love seeing the tenderness in Jesus' response to this shameful woman who touched his robe. Only when he has raised her up to her full stature, does he go on to heal the child.

In this gospel everyone is restored to their proper place – the leader must become vulnerable, the outcast is brought into the centre, and the dead child is raised into life. The man, the woman and the child are all healed and brought to their true place as human beings.

Yes, I love this gospel.

But unfortunately I hate it too.

How easy it all sounds. Most of us live amongst people in pain, fragile, aging, physically vulnerable. The gospel seems so far from our reality. Just yesterday, I heard of 2 people diagnosed with cancer, 3 children diagnosed with life-long disabilities, one person who had died, 2 others suffering psychological stress. This on top of the already long list of people we know who are ill.

Where is Jesus now? If only we could touch the hem of his garment. If only we could just fall at his feet and beg him to come to our home and do his healing work. But he is not here in the flesh, and too often it feels our prayers just go out into the ether. Our pleas for healing more often feel like a groping in the dark, a reaching out for something we can't be sure of, an aching hope that maybe we'll feel a hand reaching back to us from the dark spaces and the uncertain futures.

Faith seems less tangible for us, more elusive, and healing seems less black and white, less simple. Yes, we pray for healing and we trust our prayers have effect, but so often it is hard to see. So often we don't know what to pray for, and too often our prayers produce the opposite of what we want.

I do wish Jesus could stand before us to touch and talk to and, dare I say, kick against.

The gospel reminds us that everyone is in a different place on the human journey, and that healing is ultimately about being raised up to our full stature before God and before others.

The little girl is told to get up from where she's been laid low upon her sick bed. Here the healing is straight forward. She is sick and she is raised.

But with the adults, things are more complex. Jairus, the community leader, needs to be brought low before healing can happen. Who in his community would ever have expected to see him falling at the feet of an itinerant preacher and begging? Yet here he is, in full view of the crowds, on his knees and pleading for his daughter. Jesus delays to help the outcast woman, which really brings Jairus down to

size. He then disappears from the story. But with the healing of his daughter, he too would have been quietly, invisibly raised up, justified in his humility and his faith.

Then we have the woman with the haemorrhage, already as low as she could be, bowed down by the weight of her illness and her shame, unable even to come to Jesus face to face. But he raises her up, affirms her before the crowds, and heals her, physically, emotionally, spiritually and socially.

Healing is complex – if only it was as easy as touching the hem of a garment. Who knows what's there in a human heart and life that needs to be caught up in the healing. We simply need to keep praying for one another, for those suffering around us, and for ourselves. Physical healing is a mystery to me. I believe it happens in greater and lesser degrees, but ultimately it cannot be separated from the whole human journey that all of us travel, that journey ultimately into God.

But still I wish, after a day like yesterday, it could be as easy as touching the hem of a garment. I wish I had the easy answers and the healing touch for all the people around me where suffering comes in all its many guises.

All I can do is keep praying in the darkness, in the not knowing and in the fearful times, reminding myself that physical healing is only part of the picture. Ultimately for us all, it's about being raised up as whole people before God and in ourselves.

One more thing about yesterday - yesterday was like a sandwich.

It began in the morning with the men's breakfast. Just me and 20 or so male companions! But the conversation got onto our concerns about the absence of younger people from the church. It was a good discussion. We recognised the need for change but also the need to hold onto what is deeply important for us.

Then my day filled up with pastoral matters – people's stories of suffering and change, uncertainty and fragility, stories held in hope and love, family and community.

In the evening, we had offered the youth organisation, Fusion, the use of our hall for its youth group. They'd had a day out and finished up at St Andrew's for a discussion and simple meal. When I went down to lock up, the leader of the group was so grateful to us for allowing them the space. The leader said they'd had a good time, and with obvious joy, told me 2 of the young people had given their lives to Christ that night.

I felt quite moved. After the discussion that morning, here on our own premises, the work of the gospel was bearing fruit amongst young people. I told him I would pray for them and I ask you to pray for these 2 young people just setting out on the journey of faith. I came away thinking we'd provided a kind of nest for this fledgling work, a safe place within a community of prayer for these young people to do the work we cannot do.

In the morning we'd asked the question. In the evening I saw something of an answer. And in between I saw a day filled with stories of the human journey where wisdom is gained and love is deepened. I felt I'd caught a glimpse of who we are called to be. You are a community of wise ones, elder folk, rich in the sufferings and joys of human life, steeped in the traditions and mysteries of faith, wrinkled and worn enough to have something to say, and held together in a community of friendship, love and prayer.

There is something here which is hugely valuable, something of the nest where the young can find a safe space to grow. There is wisdom gained from going the distance through illness and suffering and fragility. Though faith becomes less black and white, it is somehow more substantial, deeper. While I wish it was as easy as touching the hem of a garment, ultimately we need much more for our journeys.

As I think about who we are called to be as a parish, we need to honour and hold onto that richness of human experience which people like yourselves have acquired through the living of life in all its fullness, its dark and its light.

Dare I say, even Jesus didn't go the distance which many of you are doing. At 30 something he had barely got out of the youth group!

The Diocese wants us to come up with a Mission Action Plan. We need to build on and complete the work we did in last year's visioning. Each Sunday in July we'll look at one aspect of what we need to do so that we've done some ground work before bringing the whole thing together. I will also put something in the pewsheet so those who have to miss a Sunday won't miss out.

Do pray for the 2 young people who invited God into their lives last night. Pray for the work of Fusion. Pray for all people in need of God's healing grace. And pray for us that we might discern how God is calling us to offer the wisdom and space that the years have grown in us.

And for yourselves – imagine Jesus before you, bend down and touch his robe, and then see his eyes looking into you and saying, 'Go in peace, your faith has raised you up'.

Catherine Eaton