

TRINITY 3

PREACHER : Catherine Staziker, Cathedral Reader

Sunday, June 27th 2009

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27, 2 Corinthians 8:7-15, Mark 5:21-43 (Year B)

10.30am
Rochester Cathedral

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.

Today's Gospel of healing and restoration of life is full of contrasts and connections that weave the two incidents together tightly. You might say that these two incidents together help us to understand each of them. They both involve women in crisis – in fact, we don't know them by their names but by their needs – both "daughters" of Abraham, not outsiders to begin with but now both subject to the taboos around the mysterious power of life (blood) and the even more mysterious (and seemingly unconquerable) power of death. Neither a bleeding woman nor a dead girl should be touched, for fear of transferring their uncleanness to others.

A woman.
A nameless woman,
A poor nameless woman
A bleeding poor nameless woman.

She had suffered from haemorrhages for 12 years and had spent her money on searching for a cure, but without success. Imagine the pain, the tiredness, the inconvenience. But the physical symptoms were nothing compared to the social and emotional pain she had to bear.

A bleeding poor nameless woman.
An outcast, shunned by society.

As a Jew she was considered unclean because of her bleeding. She was segregated from all that was holy in order to keep her from defiling it with her uncleanness. No man would have her for a wife because she was unclean. As long as the bleeding continued she was socially isolated. As long as she was unclean she was told by the religious authorities that she was unfit to worship God. Everyone she touched was considered to have contracted the contamination.

This woman had heard of Jesus and that she took it upon herself to touch his cloak so that she could be healed. This was a bold act indeed. She was unclean. What would the crowd say? What would they do if she touched the Holy Rabbi? **He** might rebuke her. The crowd might stone her. But she reached out to Jesus anyway. This was a desperate act of faith by a desperate woman.

A bleeding poor nameless woman committing an act of defiling a rabbi while he was unaware of her presence.

When challenged she admits her action. And the fear with which she does so tells us something of her own sense of uncleanness, unworthiness her expectation that her touch would be disgusting to Jesus. But instead of blame she gets praise for her faith.

“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” Jesus restores her to her rightful place in the community.

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A leader in the synagogue, a man of standing, Jairus. A man with a sick daughter. A man who had heard of this new teacher and healer Jesus. A man who fell on his knees publicly before Jesus such was his faith that Jesus could heal his daughter. Again, a bold act, an act of faith – leaders of the Synagogue were not supposed to believe in charismatic prophets like Jesus. He pleaded for Jesus to come quickly or his daughter would die. I came to Jesus as I was, Weary, and worn, and sad;

But before Jesus got away Jairus' friends arrived to say that his daughter was dead. Jairus must have felt pretty angry - He, the leader of the synagogue and this would-be rabbi wastes his time on some unclean woman. "If he had just come when I told him to, she wouldn't be dead now!" But before Jairus could put his rage into words Jesus reached out to him and said, "Do not fear, only believe." Jesus took the girl's hand and said, "Little girl, get up!" And she stood up and began to walk and they were all amazed.

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The sandwiching of these two stories is significant. As Jesus sets off for the house of a prominent religious official, He stops and looks for an obscure "unclean" woman who has touched his cloak. This shows us that such a woman is no less important than the child of the prominent religious leader. The telling of this story-within-a-story reminds us that the socially and religiously marginal, have a central place in God's new reigning! In the words of our offertory hymn "By thee the outcast and the poor were sought".

Faithfulness or fear, desperation or hope: there's no alternative for either one of these people, and they do whatever they have to do, whatever it takes, for the sake of healing and new life.

Jesus healed all who wanted to be healed. Jesus heals all who want to be healed. Yes, he still seeks out the poor and the outcasts, those on the edges of society, those we don't allow to fit in, those who feel that they don't fit in those who feel that they don't belong. He seeks out fishermen, tax collectors, those with addictions, prostitutes, sinners, you and me.

We all, at times, feel pain that is too deep to share with anyone: loneliness, depression, perhaps the illness or death of a loved one. We may feel that we have been bleeding spiritually and emotionally for years. But if we come to Him with our pains and troubles And have faith that (when the time is right) He **will be there** with power to heal and to give new life.

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The American theologian John Pilch says

**"Healing is the restoration of meaning to people's lives
no matter what their physical condition might be"**

Curing is very rare, but healing takes place infallibly, because sooner or later all people regain meaning in life in some form or another. At the heart of today's gospel is

"the power of new life, new hope, new being"

Jesus identifies himself with everyone and particularly those who are fearful, distressed or hurt. He offers a resting place to all who come to Him as they are, Weary, and worn, and sad; His love knows no bounds and he releases and restores us **so that we might have life – life in all its fullness.**ⁱ

And we in turn must love and lead our lives in ways that are generous: generous with ourselves, generous with what we have, with our time and our money and our gifts, but also generous and open to those who come into our lives. We need to provide them with a resting place so that they too might live life in all its fullness.

Jairus' daughter lies dying today in little girls jeopardized by illness, lack of food and water and the necessities of life, the safety and security they deserve.

What sort of miracle would it take for us to transform the world's systems, and the hearts of its people, so that all children in need can rise up to new life? We might feel overwhelmed by the suffering of children around the world, and find ourselves passively accepting it, if only out of our helplessness.

But Jesus knows from his own experience of his Father that those who suffer (for whatever reason) are always on God's mind: Jesus refuses to accept that the human condition, (including illness and dying) is outside God's concern.

The question we have to ask ourselves is whether they are outside of **our** concern. Jesus refuses to keep himself apart from those who are declared unclean by religious authorities. Do we keep ourselves removed from those whom today's society considers to be unclean, those whom we consider to be "unclean"?

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**Do we use this resting place ourselves?
Do we provide this resting place for others?**

Frederick Buechner puts us in the place of the little girl:

*Jesus speaks to us,
taking our hand and telling us to rise up and live –
for ourselves and for others.*

**"You who believe,
and you who sometimes believe and sometimes don't believe much of anything,
and you who would give almost anything to believe if only you could....
'Get up,' he says, all of you – all of you!"**

ⁱ John 10: 10