

MARK 5:21-43
ST JOHN'S, 1.7.18, 9.30 am

INTRODUCTION

If I'd been one of Jesus' disciples, I'd have been really excited by this stage! According to Mark, a few days before this, Jesus and his disciples had been caught on a boat in a storm on the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus had saved them all from drowning by calming the storm. Jesus had also healed a demon-possessed man, sending the demons into a nearby herd of pigs, who then threw themselves off a cliff and drowned. If I'd been there, I'd have been beginning to expect amazing things to happen when Jesus was around, and I'd have been eagerly asking "What next?!"

What did happen next was that this synagogue ruler called Jairus came and asked Jesus to heal his daughter; and then, just as Jesus is on his way to Jairus' house, he's delayed by the woman sneaking up behind him to grab her opportunity to be healed on the quiet. These two very different people have one thing in common - their belief and confidence in Jesus. Let's think about each of them in turn, and about how they can help us not to be afraid, but just to believe, as Jesus says to Jairus in verse 36.

THE WOMAN'S FAITH

Mark tells us that this woman's illness meant that she'd been bleeding for 12 years. I'm told that the problem was in her womb. Bleeding like that must have caused her enough suffering in itself, but under OT law,

it also made her unclean, which meant untouchable. So for 12 years, this woman hadn't been allowed to touch anyone else, and no-one would touch any of her clothes, furniture, or anything else she might have touched. She was almost totally isolated. She was cut off from God as well. She couldn't go into the Temple, or go along to worship at the local synagogue. And there was nothing she could do about it. She'd seen every doctor who might possibly have been able to cure her. She'd spent all she had trying to find a cure, and she just got worse and worse.

So you can understand why this woman didn't go and ask Jesus to heal her. She would have expected him to recoil from her in horror when she told him her problem - and imagine the likely reaction from the crowd! But she was desperate enough to risk creeping up behind him in the crowd and touching his clothes. She knew enough about Jesus to know that he could heal her. And she had enough confidence, or faith, in him to believe that touching his clothes would be enough. That's some faith!

And so the woman receives the healing she so desperately needs, and she tries to disappear amongst the crowds of people around Jesus. But Jesus realises what's happened. He wasn't expecting the woman to touch him, and he hasn't chosen to heal her, but he has felt the spiritual power leave him. Jesus knows that if someone's crept up on him secretly, then that person needs more from him than physical healing. And so he insists on knowing who it was. And as a result of their conversation, he can give her so much more:

Jesus gives this woman assurance that he accepts her. Imagine what that means to someone who's been an outcast for 12 years! Jesus gives her an assurance of God's peace. Imagine what that means to someone who's felt cut off from God for 12 years! Jesus gives her assurance that she really has been healed, for good. Imagine what that means to someone who's been suffering for 12 years! By gently forcing the woman to confess what she's done and why she's done it, Jesus confirms and strengthens her faith. And not only that: Jesus teaches this woman that faith isn't only about trusting Jesus, it's also about talking to him, and telling him everything. Before this woman was healed, she knew Jesus was able to heal her. After she'd spoken to him, she'd learned to trust him with everything. She'd learned the lesson of verse 36: "Don't be afraid; just believe".

JAIRUS' FAITH

Jairus was a synagogue ruler. So he was an important man in his community. He was one of the Jewish leaders, most of whom have already rejected Jesus, because they don't like him forgiving people for what they've done wrong, or accepting invitations from people who weren't upright members of the synagogue, or healing people on the Sabbath.

We don't know what Jairus thought about all these issues. But we do know that when he knew that his daughter was dying, he had no hesitation about asking Jesus to heal her. He knows enough about Jesus to know that he can bring his daughter back from the brink of death. And Jairus has enough confidence, or faith, in Jesus to believe

that he only needs to ask him to come, and Jesus will come, whether or not Jairus had been among those Jewish leaders who'd rejected him.

But of course, it wasn't as simple as that! There's a huge crowd following Jesus, and he can only move very slowly towards Jairus' house. I can imagine Jairus walking ahead, elbowing people out of his way, and then having to wait impatiently for Jesus to follow him. And then, Jesus suddenly stops altogether, and spends several precious minutes insisting that someone touched him, and then talking to a woman whom Jairus knows has been untouchable for the last 12 years, a woman who's outcast from society. And all the time, Jairus' daughter is dying . . . !

If I'd been Jairus, I don't think I'd have been frightened when the messengers came to say my daughter was dead - I think I'd have been really angry with Jesus for wasting all that time on someone else, and not even someone whom I thought was very important!

But Jesus doesn't allow Jairus to go on being either angry or frightened for very long. He tells him, "Don't go on fearing the worst, but keep on believing for the best". At the beginning of the story, Jairus believed in Jesus, and had confidence in him that he could heal his daughter. Jesus is now saying that although the circumstances have changed, he, Jesus, hasn't changed at all, and Jairus must continue to trust him. Jesus has confirmed and strengthened the faith of the woman whom he's healed; now he's stretching and strengthening Jairus' faith. Before

he came to Jesus, Jairus knew Jesus was able to heal his daughter. By the end of the story, he'd learned that he could trust Jesus with everything, no matter what the circumstances.

OUR FAITH - IN JESUS

We can learn a great deal about what it means to have faith in Jesus from this story. It shows us that Jesus will take what little faith we have, and he'll assure us that it's real, he'll confirm it, he'll stretch it, he'll test it. If we'll let him, Jesus will always deal with us in such a way, that we'll find our confidence in him growing deeper and stronger.

I want to point out what this story tells us about Jesus himself, because I believe that the better we know him, the more we'll be able to trust him. First of all, we can see how Jesus loves people, how he cares for them, and how he serves them. To him, the outcast woman was just as important as the daughter of the synagogue ruler - in today's terms, the beggar living rough is just as important to Jesus as the Pope or the Archbishop of Canterbury. Jesus took the time to find the woman and talk to her, and give her the encouragement and assurance she needed. At the end of the story, when no doubt Jairus and his wife were overcome with joy, and the disciples dumbstruck, Jesus shows his love and concern for the girl, who needs something to eat. We can put our trust, our confidence, our faith in Jesus, because we can read how much he cares for each individual person, no matter who they are. It doesn't matter that we can't see him; we can still take our problems and our joys to him, knowing that he's longing to hear all about them.

The other thing we can see in this story is Jesus' power. The woman has been bleeding for 12 years. Lots of specialists have treated her, but no-one's been able to cure her. Jesus healed her without even knowing about it until it had happened! The little girl is dead by the time Jesus reaches her. We don't know what Jairus thinks, but obviously the people in his household think that once she's dead, no-one can do anything. By bringing Jairus' daughter back to life, Jesus proves that he has power over life itself.

As our understanding of our Lord's unlimited love for each one of us deepens, as our understanding of his unlimited power over disease and death, and everything else in creation, grows, so we'll learn to trust him with everything, no matter what the circumstances we face, and we'll experience his love and his power at work in our own lives.

CONCLUSION

As I finish, let's each spend a moment or two thinking of any situations in our own lives which make us feel angry and afraid . . . It's not always easy to trust Jesus. We all need to encourage each other when things get tough. Let's bring our personal situations to the Lord as we pray . . .