

Bennochy church: 1st July 2018

If there was one thing that made Jesus stand out to the local population of Galilee, would be his miracles. Nothing like performing a few miracles to build a reputation and a following. After all, he was one of their own. The lad's done well. Did someone not once say, *'is that not the son of Mary and Joseph? You know, the carpenter, from Nazareth?'*

Some, would have heard his teaching and wondered where such wisdom and authority came from. He was also a good storyteller. He captured people's imagination. His parables, well they didn't really understand them! But his miracles, that is something else all together. This is impact stuff. A healing touch, after all changes lives.

Jesus has calmed the storm and healed a man with evil spirits and no doubt such news, or at least rumours of these miracles, will have travelled fast. We are told that waiting for Jesus, on the other side of the lake, was a large crowd. He is met there by a man called Jairus, an official from the local synagogue. At this early stage in Jesus ministry, he is moving in predominantly Jewish circles. We are told that this man throws himself down in front of Jesus, and asks him to come to his house and lay his hands on his very ill daughter. We must assume, that Jairus believed his daughter was close to death.

So a father pleads for his child. As any father would do. Things don't look good, and you sense, that if anything happened to her, his world would fall apart. Is his request to Jesus, one of faith or one of desperation? I don't think it actually matters. In times of crisis, we all grasp at whatever we can. For Jairus, it is Jesus, the miracle worker. He has nothing to lose. And Jesus takes that request at face value.

For Jairus, the worst possible thing then happens. He is working to a tight deadline. He needs to get Jesus to his house as quickly as he can. It might already be too late. Jesus gets interrupted by another person in need. You might imagine Jairus's reaction. *'Jesus, we need to go. Come on.'* We don't know what he said or did, but for a short period of time, Jairus disappears into the background, and a woman with a bleeding disorder takes centre stage and she comes to stand out from the crowd.

That is an exaggeration. As Jesus passes her by, she does not make herself known. She says nothing. She is embarrassed, she is in pain and maybe a bit depressed at what she has had to endure. Contrast the approach of these two people, brought together in this story because they had heard of Jesus. Could he be their last resort? Both had nothing to lose.

It is just a simple touch. A stretching out of her hand. Maybe just to lightly brush Jesus clothing. Healing comes to the woman

and Jesus knows something has happened. Now, he could have carried on, in the knowledge someone had been healed, but he stops to find out who it is, or more importantly, why they have done it.

In fear, the woman admits it was her. I wonder what she was she fearful of? There is no doubt that she would have been embarrassed at her very personal medical condition. That would not have been easy. Apart from going public, in that ancient world, for a woman with such a disorder, to touch a man, would have been greatly frowned upon. Never mind what Jesus would say, how would the crowd react to her?

I suspect, to the astonishment of the crowd, Jesus did not rebuke her, but said to her, *'My daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace.'* I ask again, in that situation, what is faith?

The crowd are wondering what has just taken place. Has a miracle just happened in front of their eyes? Has this woman been healed? Are they angry? 'Did you see that 'unclean' woman touching the rabbi?' Amazement, anger, and all the while, Jarius is champing at the bit. Remember him? The news that he dreaded now arrived. His daughter had died. 'Don't bother Jesus any more. What is the point. Give up, go home and mourn your loss.'

He might well have done that, but Jesus approach to this news is totally different. 'She is not dead, only sleeping'. Are some in the crowd laughing, mocking him? Jesus says to Jarius, 'don't be afraid, only believe'. In that situation, what is faith? What did Jarius actually think was going to happen? I have no idea and I am not sure he did either.

He is caught up in a highly charged emotional situation, where you hold onto anything positive that anyone says, and in hope, you continue the journey. And that is precisely what he did. As this man gathered around his daughter's bed with Jesus, what was his faith? And in the face of the impossible, his daughter is healed.

The writer of the book of Hebrews says this, *"To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see."* (11:1) These two people had a deep hope for healing. It is what they longed for more than anything else, and it is what, I believe, Jesus recognised.

We have all been in places where the deep hope for a miracle is all we are left with. We cling onto that certainty, because our trust is in that which we cannot see or have any control over. At that moment, that is where we stand, as did Jarius and the woman. What is painful, is when the story has a different ending. Healing expressed in a different way, even the death of a loved one.

These are stories of encounter, and if you drill down into them, faith is about perseverance; a long term illness and an interrupted journey. But faith is not defined in these stories. It is expressed; in the reaching out to Jesus. That is what we all do, in the hope that Jesus will touch our lives. Amen.