

So I think the way to start this is to dip straight into God's word. So we're going to read Mark 5:25-34. I'll just give a few minutes because I know some of you like to follow in your own Bibles. Starting at verse 25...

[Reading Mark 5:25-34]

So I want to start by setting the scene of this story, or event, because when I looked it up it's actually set inside another story, and it's actually sandwiched between the story of Jairus and his daughter. Now I know that in this series we're looking at woman that Jesus met but this was another young lady that Jesus met and her story is encased around, it's sandwiched around, this story of the bleeding woman, or the woman with the bleeding. And the reason that Mark often did this in his writing and throughout the gospel was to enhance and magnify the message, so it almost, you know, I heard someone saying: "if you want people to really hear something you've got to say it three times." So this is the same principle: it's almost gets being said twice in these stories and what Tom Wright was saying (who I looked up, I'm a great fan of Tom Wright) was that you have to take these two stories together to get the full meaning. Both stories had a message of fear and Faith – so Fear going to Faith. So we're not going to say too much about Jairus; I want to concentrate more on the woman with the bleeding, as one of the women that Jesus met in his ministries. So let's turn to her.

She had internal bleeding. We're not told exactly what that bleeding was but I think probably a lot of us ladies can pretty much guess what it was, and probably the men as well. It's encased in all sorts of language even today: "women's problems" - You just don't talk about it, even openly today. And this has been going on for her and her family for the past 12 years. And those 12 years would have been a very difficult 12 years. Apart from the physical discomfort she may have suffered (and the passage suggests that she was in discomfort), she may have suffered due to her condition – she would have been a social and religious outcast. In her culture, and in the Jewish law, anyone who had bleeding, including men but particularly women, were considered impure, unclean. And if you were impure, or unclean, nobody would want to come too close to you.

I guess it was the "Social distancing" of the New Testament: this person's impure, they're unclean, we don't have contact with them, we stay away from them (make sure we stay our 2m away from them). If you sat on something that a woman with her period had sat on you were unclean. So you can start to see from that that for her family – this wouldn't have just affected her socially and religiously – it would have affected her whole family. Her husband (if she had one), her children and any other person that probably lived in the household.

On top of that, she had used all her financial resources trying desperately to cure and rid herself of this horrible condition; but instead of a cure she became worse. And of course all of this was on top of the fact that in her society, in her culture, all woman were effectively second class citizens: so she was probably a third class citizen by the stage, an outcast, unwanted, dirty, not be touched – to be outcast from Society. And I'm guessing that by the time she came to Jesus, when she heard about Jesus and decided that she was going to go and try and just touch him, she was probably at the end of her tether – she was probably depressed, anxious, could see no end in sight – until Jesus came along and she thought, "do you know what? I'm going to go and try and touch – just touch – his clothing." She'd probably had enough; really had enough by now. "I'm just going

to go try and just touch his cloak, touch his clothing.” Remember this woman had probably suffered physically, emotionally and financially.

So off she went, took a risk, a gamble – because it was a gamble, it was a risk, it could have really have backfired on her horribly. Off she went. If only she could just touch a little bit of his clothing. And just in doing that she had shown enormous bravery and faith.

Jesus knew the instant she touched him that power had left him. He knew someone was there. She just reached out, just touched his cloak, and Jesus, Jesus was determined that he was going to find: “Who touched me? Who touched me? Power has left me.” Something's happened in the spiritual realm. Something important has happened. So she reached out, touched him, and she was completely renewed. And eventually she owned up, came and spoke to Jesus and told him what had happened, and he told her “Your faith has healed you.” And he completely restored her.

Now, at a surface reading it would be easy to think “Oh that's nice! He's done a physical healing. He's got rid of whatever the woman problem was, he's got rid of it. That's really nice.” But actually when you understand the Jewish law and her society and culture you realise that he did a lot lot more than that, because he didn't just restore her physically – he restored her socially and emotionally, he brought her back into the community because she could become clean again and lose her impurity. He brought her back into the fold, she could interact with her family again properly, with her friends again properly. And of course she wouldn't have to keep shelling out to doctors – whatever financial she had could be used for different ways, probably to help her and family to buy things that they'd not been able to buy, maybe even help to come out of poverty.

I just want to say a little bit here about Jairus and his daughter, because Jairus we're told he was quite high up in the Synagogue, he was the president. And Jesus was a bit of a risk to him as well because, as we'll see in a minute, Jesus was trying to bring in something that the Romans wouldn't have liked. So there was a massive risk to Jairus and his congregation – it might be very easy to think “I just wish this Jesus would go away because politically, and from a religious point of view, that he could have been big trouble.” But then his daughter became very very ill and he heard that Jesus had come back over across the lake again. And the parental love kicked in, parental concern, heartbreak, desperation – a bit like our lady with the bleeding – so he went and got Jesus to come to his house, and people said “No don't bother the teacher, your daughter's already dead.”

But he went, Jesus went, and raised Jairus' daughter. Jairus was very brave to do what he did, but he reached out as well and just touch that cloak, touched Jesus “Will you come and help my daughter?” And his daughter, interestingly enough, was 12 – so she'd been alive the same amount of time that the woman had had her bleeding. So the two tie [together]. This young girl, in terms of the Jewish culture, would have been on the verge of adulthood, of womanhood, because at the age she was as she would have been just about the age when she would have married.

Now we don't think of 12-year olds marrying in our society, and in fact in other countries where it happens we despise it. But you have to remember that in the culture that Jesus lived in people only tended to live on an average to their mid 30s – 40s if they were lucky. So everything happened a bit earlier in life than normal. Mary when she had Jesus was probably about 13 or 14 – a teenage mother. But these two people reached out to Jesus; “Please, please sort our problem.” And Jesus did. And if we reach out to Christ he will too meet us in our need. If we reach out through prayer, through meditation, through reading his word he will come to us.

Now, I just want to say something at this point which in some ways is what even people who are

atheistic or agnostic argue. We know for a fact that Jesus would not have healed everybody in Capernaum (where he was that day) or Jerusalem or wherever it was he was – he healed some people but the vast majority wouldn't have been healed. So why did he heal these people? Why these two people: the woman with the bleeding and the young girl (both women that Jesus met in his ministry)?

Well, there's even something more fundamental going on. Something far more fundamental going on in these two events. Jesus came to bring the “New Order”, the Kingdom of God, and if you want to see those values of the Kingdom of God we just need to go to Matthew and read the Beatitudes – it's kind of an upside down world where there is justice, social justice, fairness, nobody left behind, everybody has an equal part in the Kingdom of God – whether you're a woman with bleeding, whether you're a 12-year old child with a serious illness, whether you're the president of the local village synagogue – everybody is welcome in the Kingdom. And these healings were almost like the Kingdom breaking through.

Now we've got this really difficult situation at the moment where the Kingdom has come but it's not here yet. And I preached a sermon quite a few years ago (it was quite a few years ago now) and I used the example to describe the Kingdom of Apple, because it was just at the time where the iPad hasn't quite hit the shops, it wasn't quite here yet, but it has come because you could see it on the telly, you could see Apple talking about it. And they were telling you what was going to be on this wonderful device: you'd see photos (it was going to be able to do photos), it was going to be able to do this, it was going to be able to do that, and they got anybody really excited, but you couldn't go to the shops, you couldn't go to Currys up the road and buy an iPad – not just yet. So it had come but it wasn't quite here. And that's kind of what the Kingdom of God is like: it's sort of here – it's there – but it's coming. And the healings allowed the Kingdom of God to just break through, for us to hear and be aware of that kingdom, be aware of the wonder that was coming.

Thinking about today and some of the prayers we've already prayed this morning:

- the pandemic – we're hoping it's going in the right direction, but there's still that fear that we could get another variant. I was seeing this week (I forget what country it was but) one hospital that was still so overwhelmed with covid victims, they were treating people in the car park – there wasn't room in the hospital for them. They had no room – it was just so overwhelmed. It's still in some countries. There's the fear: what's gonna happen?
- There's the fear on what's going to happen in the Ukraine. And Boris Johnson, our own Prime Minister, said yesterday if war kicks off in the Ukraine it's gonna be the biggest war in Europe since the Second World War; it could potentially get very nasty. There's the fear.
- There the cost of living fear. We keep getting told that all the utility bills are going to go sky high, the costs are going up for food, don't ask for too much of a pay rise – it's quite scary for some people on low incomes. What's going to happen in the next few months, the rest of this year, with the cost of living?

And there's all these fears around us, whirling around us at the moment and people may be living with their own fear. One of the things that I really thought about when I was preparing this sermon was that this woman with her bleeding, she would have been an outcast in her society, forgotten and there are so many people because the NHS has had to concentrate so hard on the pandemic, and so much of their resources have been used up trying to get on top of the pandemic, that there are people out there who have other illnesses (like Cancer or heart conditions, or all sorts of things) who haven't had treatment. I know a case where that did happen

- sadly the lady's passed on but she didn't get the palliative radiotherapy that she was promised that would've just eased that end maybe a little bit, but the pandemic hit and they were just too scared to take her even near the hospital.

You may be living with your own set of worries and fears that I don't know about, but God's Kingdom is on its way: Christ will come back; this not go on forever, there will be an end to all suffering. And in the meantime we can call on Jesus to help us because the Kingdom is here now.

And I just want to finish by saying that we need to have faith in Jesus. We need to turn towards him, give him our fears, our worries and real concerns that we have. I do sincerely hope that there is not war in Ukraine and the people of Ukraine can live in peace in their country, in their own country. I do really pray that the pandemic is going in the right direction and will keep going in the right direction and we can start to see and end, or it goes endemic and it becomes a little bit more like most of our other sort of seasonal illnesses. And I do hope that the cost of living is a manageable thing for everybody. And we can have faith that Christ knows our fears and worries, and he will be there for us in our suffering, in our struggles.

Let's just pray as we finish.

Lord we do give you the fears and anxiety and worry around the pandemic. We do pray for the people of Ukraine and we pray for the western leaders as they try to find peace with Russia. We pray that they are successful and that there can be peace in the Ukraine. I also pray as well Lord for wisdom over the cost of living, that the government can find a way to make it possible for everybody to lead a life above the poverty line that doesn't mean in luxury but to just manage to buy their essentials without having to worry where the next meal or money for fuel is coming from. We give all these fears to you Lord. I also give all the fear that's in the congregation that we don't know about to you and we ask that they can have faith: faith to come to you and to just touch your cloak, faith to know that you're present with them and that they're not on their own, faith to know that your Kingdom is coming and will come on your appointed day. And we pray this Lord in your name. Amen