



Matthew 9:18–26

18 While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” 19 Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. 20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. 21 She said to herself,

“If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” 22 Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment. 23 When Jesus entered the synagogue leader’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, 24 he said, “Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. 25 After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. 26 News of this spread through all that region.

Reflection

(Today’s talk is given by Justin Moffatt.)

These are two touching moments. Both moments involve women. Both are in need. Both have become 'unclean' in Jewish Society. Both moments are tragic. Both come into direct contact with Jesus. Both moments involve touch. Both are relieved of their suffering. Both have a reversal of what appears to be inevitable: the woman becomes 'clean', and the little girl gains her life. Or rather, the girl's father gets his little daughter, back from the dead.

But they are more than touching moments. They tell us something of the identity of Jesus Christ, and of the nature of faith. What do you notice from these two stories? Did you notice is there is a simple structure going on. The two stories are intertwined. Locked together.

The man comes to say his daughter is dead (first story), then, on the way, a woman with constant menstrual issues -- comes to touch his cloak and is healed (second story) and then the little girl -- back to first story -- is raised to life. See how these stories are interwoven? More than one commentator has called this structure a 'sandwich'. (I know that sound all very technical!) What is a sandwich? A sandwich is two bits of bread on the outside, and sandwich filling on the inside. In other words, the second story is the filling, sandwiched by the first story. And they appear unrelated; except that they are healing stories. Or, for any of you who remember this from school: it is an A-B-A Structure. A: A man comes to Jesus with faith about his daughter. B: A woman 'subject to bleeding' touches Jesus, and she is 'saved'. A: The man re-

ceives his daughter back from the dead, after Jesus touches her.

Why does the passage have this structure? (The writer could have just told the two stories separately.) Well – there is the obvious: that Matthew is simply recording what happened. But Gospel writers are usually more deliberate than that. We learn something about Jesus’ approach to one thing in these two stories: his approach to uncleanness.

The little girl is dead, and in Jewish society, you don’t touch dead bodies. But Jesus does. And he doesn’t get ‘infected’ by touching the dead girl. Just the opposite: he gives her life.

And of the woman with bleeding? For

those of you who have heard of the Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia today – well you know that constant bleeding in a woman can be one of the most ostracising things in society. This woman (in our passage) not only hurts from her illness, but, in Jewish society, she is unclean. Too much blood. Any blood! But she comes to Jesus and touches him. Which would normally make him unclean. Bishop Tom Wright says: “At this point in the story, we realise that something is different. Her ‘uncleanness’ doesn’t infect him. Something in him infects her.” What do we learn from the passage? Jesus takes on my uncleanness, so I can be cleaned. Cleansed. And this is what the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is all about.

What is our problem? We live in an un-

clean world. By which the writers of the New Testament didn't ultimately mean merely 'ritual uncleanness'. They meant that the world has a sort of 'heart pollution', that we share. We live in a world of sin and darkness, of social exclusion and illness, and ultimately of death. We are the woman in the passage, unacceptable to God. At first. We are the little girl in the passage: dead in our sins and transgressions. At first.

But there is faith in this story. And healing. The dad (named Jairus in another gospel) forgets all social norms to run up to Jesus and fall on his knees and declares that Jesus can heal his daughter, who here in Matthew is already dead. Such trust. Do you need to foster and cultivate this kind of trust in your heart?

The woman doesn't want to bother anyone. She pops up behind Jesus and with the lightest of touch, goes for the hem of his cloak. Just a touch. But – here in Matthew anyway, she isn't healed by the touch, but by something else. But we get a glimpse into her heart; into her motivation. Verse 21,

She said to herself, 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.'

Such trust. But it wasn't the touch which healed her. It was Jesus who healed her with a word:

Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter,' he said, 'your faith has healed you.' And the woman

was healed at that moment.

The word 'healed' is actually the word 'saved' or 'rescued'. Or even more dramatically: 'The woman was saved, from that hour.' No follower of this Jesus would miss the point. What Jesus was doing here was the beginning of his whole work of rescuing the world, saving the world, from everything that polluted, defaced and destroyed it. And those who benefit would be those who would believe. Do you believe?

Jesus brushes past all the sceptics who laugh at Jesus for saying that the man's daughter is 'just sleeping'. But the joke is on them. Jesus has the last laugh over death.

25 After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up.

The words 'she got up', is the same words for 'raised' or 'resurrected'.

Followers of Jesus believe that when you see Jesus, you see God. To study Jesus is to study God. This is our God, accepting the unacceptable and raising the dead. John the Baptist in Matthew 11:2-5 wanted to know for sure who Jesus was. Matthew records:

2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?' 4 Jesus replied, 'Go back and report

to John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

Think & Pray

Take the time now to reflect on the passage, and allow it to cultivate faith, and to take away the sceptical heart. Find one or two phrases that stand out and let those words dwell richly in you.

What words or phrase would you choose? Do that when this is finished reading this. Let me tell you mine: It's in verse 22: Take heart, daughter. Chin up. Trust Jesus. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord.

Jesus is my Messiah who touched me, the unclean one, and in doing so made me clean and gave me life.