

**28th June, 2015.**

**Reading: Mark 5: 21 - 43**

**Sermon The Future of the Church**

Can you imagine the headlines in the press? 'Woman Miraculously Healed After Twelve Years' and the second one: 'Daughter of Synagogue Leader Raised From Dead'. The press would have gone to town with those two stories and goodness knows what conclusions the reporters would have drawn. Indeed, there is no way of knowing how the stories would even have been told.

However, Mark tells the stories, not to sensationalise them, as the press might well have done. He tells the stories to shed some light on the significance of Jesus' life.

In the second of the stories, in the raising of Jairus' daughter, there is one phrase which jumps out of the page, the phrase used by Jesus when he reaches Jairus' house: **This child is not dead but asleep.** The press would have had a field day with that statement. As it was, the people laughed at him and probably thought he was mad, that is until Jairus' daughter stood up.

The second thing which stands out for me in the stories is the number twelve. The woman had been haemorrhaging for twelve years and Jairus' daughter was twelve years of age.

Is this just a coincidence or does Mark have a reason for mentioning the number twelve? I have a feeling it is significant and you'll hear why in a moment. If there is a reason, maybe that explains why Mark chose to put those

two particular stories together? That combination seems to fulfil His purpose in shedding some light on Jesus' life, but again that will become clear.

The theme of both stories is healing, both individuals are healed but Jesus' purpose on earth was greater than the healing of individuals. Alongside the healing of individuals, His purpose was the healing of villages and towns and cities and nations.

At the time of the Passover, Jesus stood and wept as He looked over Jerusalem and He said: **If only you knew today, what would bring you peace** but, of course, they didn't.

Not much has changed in two thousand years. Nation is still fighting nation. Religious factions are lashing out at one another, ultimately even within their own faith group and individuals' lives are being destroyed as a result. We only have to look at the news this week to see that. We cannot go on like this, with this reign of terror. Individuals and nations still need to know what will bring them peace and we need to get that message out there.

Returning to the two stories, there is a symbolism present which transcends the physical healing of the two individuals and that symbolism links them together and sheds light on both stories. That symbolism points to something beyond the physical healing of the woman and the child, just as is the case in the parables which Jesus told. But for me, it is also interesting that Jesus uses a woman and a child to make his point.

When we think about the woman, what was happening to her? She was haemorrhaging. The life blood was draining from her, albeit slowly.

The minister from St. Andrew's Scots Memorial Church in Jerusalem, whose name I can't pronounce, was the one who suggested that there was a link between the two stories.

The number twelve, he says, is what links them. The number twelve, he says, is symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, so symbolic of God's people.

The woman therefore represents God's people, the Church, which has been haemorrhaging for years, the life blood seemingly draining away. We only need to look at the Churches in Argyll to see that. We have four vacancies between Inveraray and Campbeltown which, with linkages and unions, means that there are at least twelve Churches in that area without a minister.

That is only in this part of Argyll presbytery. A lack of younger people coming into our Churches means there are fewer and fewer people to train, a sign of the haemorrhaging which is taking place. The life blood seems to be draining from the Church, from the people of God.

And then when we look at the child, at Jairus' daughter, the child seems dead. The people are wailing. It is all over. One generation is haemorrhaging. The other is dead. What does that imply about the future of the people of God?

The child represents the future of the people of God. If there are no young people, the Church will die out. Looking

at the woman and the child, it seems to be a pretty bleak picture which is being painted but is it that bad?

Well, we often think it is, don't we? Where will we be in ten years? I've asked that question before, many times. Maybe we won't need ministers because there will be so few people left. That is often the way our minds work because there seems to be little good news, little growth, and yet, is that really the way it is going to be?

We also behave as if the end is nigh as we frantically try to think of new ways of doing things to stop the haemorrhaging. The woman had spent years trying this cure and that cure. She had spent a fortune and none of the cures had worked.

However, when we read the story, we see that, in Jesus, the woman found her salvation. She found healing and her haemorrhaging ceased. Her healing came from Jesus, from the Saviour of the world. She did not find it in anything else or in anyone else. The people of God still won't. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, but by Him.

There are references in Scripture to the bride of Christ. The Church is that bride. The woman represents the Church, the people of God, and so in her healing, we see hope. Jesus will not let the life blood drain from His bride, from His people if we turn to Him. If we draw on His strength, the haemorrhaging will stop.

We also see hope for the people of God, when we turn to the child, who looked dead. As everyone looked at her, they saw no way back. The life had gone from her and yet

Jesus' comment is that **She is asleep**. In other words, the child will rise again. She will come to life again. She will awaken from her slumbers and He says to her father: **Do not fear, only believe**.

There is an incredible encouragement in that story. If the child represents the future of the Church, the future of the people of God, the implication is that the Church in the future will be alive. The child will awaken. New life will be pumped into the Church through Christ, through faith in Christ, through trusting in Christ. To us, Jesus would say: **Do not fear, only believe**.

Maybe, as the people of God, we need to refocus. Maybe we need to turn back to God, and rather than being so busy doing things, maybe we just need to take time to be with God because only through trust and faith will the haemorrhaging stop and the new life be awakened in us.

But you see, it's not just for us that we need to refocus but it maybe has to begin with us. We need to refocus for potentially the healing of our relationships with family members. We need to refocus for the healing of our communities. We need to refocus for the healing of the nations. We need to refocus if this world is to find peace. **If only you knew today what would bring you peace**.

There is one final comment I wish to make which really draws the two stories together, the two stories which shed light on why Jesus came.

Let's go back, just for a moment, to the story of the woman who was haemorrhaging and who stands for the people of God and ultimately for the bride of Christ.

There is nothing that a groom, who is desperately in love with his bride, will not do for her. Jesus came to save His bride, to bring healing to her and to offer His bride a future and a hope. There is nothing that He would not do for her.

Ultimately, He bled and died to save His bride, to save the people of God, to save those whom He loved. In Him we have hope for the future because through Him new life will come to His people when we reach out and touch Him, as the woman did who was haemorrhaging. New life will come to His people as He takes our hands in His and awakens us to the life that is ours through Him as He did for the child. He will raise us up to new life. **Do not fear, only believe.**

But we need to be prepared to meet with Him and to trust Him so that the peace of which He spoke, can come to all peoples and to all nations and it must begin with us.

I came across a poem last night on Facebook which was put on by a friend I had in secondary school. I haven't seen her for donkey's years but she posted this:

A Minister passing through his Church  
In the middle of the day,  
Decided to pause by the altar  
To see who came to pray.  
Just then the back door opened,  
And a man came down the aisle,  
The minister frowned as he saw the man  
Hadn't shaved in a while.  
His shirt was torn and shabby,

And his coat was worn and frayed,  
The man knelt down and bowed his head,  
Then rose and walked away.

In the days that followed at precisely noon,  
The preacher saw this chap,  
Each time he knelt just for a moment,  
A lunch pail in his lap.  
Well, the minister's suspicions grew,  
With robbery a main fear,  
He decided to stop and ask the man,  
'What are you doing here?'

The old man said he was a factory worker  
And lunch was half an hour.  
Lunchtime was his prayer time,  
For finding strength and power.  
I stay only a moment  
Because the factory's far away;  
As I kneel here talking to the Lord,  
This is kinda what I say:

'I JUST CAME BY TO TELL YOU, LORD,  
HOW HAPPY I HAVE BEEN,  
SINCE WE FOUND EACH OTHER'S FRIENDSHIP  
AND YOU TOOK AWAY MY SIN.  
DON'T KNOW MUCH OF HOW TO PRAY,  
BUT I THINK ABOUT YOU EVERYDAY.  
SO, JESUS, THIS IS BEN,

JUST CHECKING IN TODAY.'

The minister feeling foolish,  
Told Ben that it was fine.  
He told the man that he was welcome  
To pray there anytime.  
'It's time to go, and thanks,' Ben said  
As he hurried to the door.  
Then the minister knelt there at the altar,  
Which he'd never done before.  
His cold heart melted, warmed with love,  
As he met with Jesus there.  
As the tears flowed down his cheeks,  
He repeated old Ben's prayer:

'I JUST CAME BY TO TELL YOU, LORD,  
HOW HAPPY I HAVE BEEN,  
SINCE WE FOUND EACH OTHER'S FRIENDSHIP  
AND YOU TOOK AWAY MY SIN.  
I DON'T KNOW MUCH OF HOW TO PRAY,  
BUT I THINK ABOUT YOU EVERYDAY.  
SO, JESUS, THIS IS ME,  
JUST CHECKING IN TODAY.'

Past noon one day, the minister noticed  
That old Ben hadn't come.  
As more days passed and still no Ben,  
He began to worry some.  
At the factory, he asked about him,



Learning he was ill.  
The hospital staff was worried,  
But he'd given them a thrill.

The week that Ben was with them,  
Brought changes in the ward.  
His smiles and joy contagious.  
Changed people were his reward.  
The head nurse couldn't understand  
Why Ben could be so glad,  
When no flowers, calls or cards came,  
Not a visitor he had.

The minister stayed by his bed,  
He voiced the nurse's concern:  
No friends had come to show they cared.  
He had nowhere to turn.  
Looking surprised, old Ben spoke up  
And with a winsome smile;  
'The nurse is wrong, she couldn't know,  
He's been here all the while.'  
Everyday at noon He comes here,  
A dear friend of mine, you see,  
He sits right down and takes my hand,  
Leans over and says to me:

'I JUST CAME BY TO TELL YOU, BEN,  
HOW HAPPY I HAVE BEEN,  
SINCE WE FOUND THIS FRIENDSHIP,

AND I TOOK AWAY YOUR SIN.  
I THINK ABOUT YOU ALWAYS  
AND I LOVE TO HEAR YOU PRAY,  
AND SO BEN, THIS IS JESUS,  
JUST CHECKING IN TODAY .'

We need to take time to check in with Jesus and we need to allow Him time to check in with us. When we are able, like the woman in the story, we can go to Him. When we are unable to do so, like the child, He will come to us. Either way, we need to nurture that friendship and allow it to deepen and to change us so that we can impact through His power on the world around us.