

MARK 5:21-43
HEALING FAITH!

Feeling helpless is a dreadful emotion. It happens in so many different ways, but mainly we feel helpless when we're in a situation we can't control and we can see no way out of it. We find ourselves in a situation that is perhaps not of our making and we feel frightened by it, but there is nothing that we can do to change that situation and so we develop a sense of helplessness. For some people that sense deepens when the same situation repeats itself time and again and having been helpless the first time, the next time the sense is stronger. We have no control; all we can do is let circumstances take their course and we simply feel helpless. You can tell me all kinds of stories of being and feeling helpless, I'm sure: maybe you or someone close to you was ill and no matter how many hospital appointments you attended nothing was better, so you begin to feel helpless and you can't change things and maybe nobody else can either; there are women who are victims of abuse and made to feel that it is their fault and no-one is listening to them when they cry for help and it is even dangerous to cry for help, so they feel helpless in not being able to change their situation; children who are bullied at school know they should tell a teacher, but they also know that it is dangerous to do that, because it might make matters worse and so they stay silent and suffer the bullying in silence with a growing sense of helplessness and for some the only way out is to consider suicide, such is their deep sense of helplessness.

For Christians, it is not always easy to see the way out. The easy answer is to pray because God listens and answers our prayers and Jesus is our Friend and that is true; nothing of that is wrong. But when we feel helpless, we're not always sure that God is listening to our prayers; we're not always sure that God is even there and we're certainly frightened that He is not answering our prayers. A few years ago I came across this piece: it is called "*I asked...*" It says this:

"I asked God for strength that I might achieve, but I was made weak that I might learn
humility.

I asked for health that I might do great things, but I was given infirmity that I might do
better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy, but I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life, but I was given life that I might enjoy all
things.

I got nothing I asked for, but everything I hoped for.

Despite myself my prayers were answered. I am among people most richly blessed." God does listen and answer, but at the Kirk Session meeting on Wednesday, I quoted this: "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards" and that can be scary; helplessness wants to see what we so often only see looking backwards over our lives; in midst of our fears, we still feel helpless and scared and still not sure that God is listening. "I asked... but..."

The two people in our bible passage today felt helpless. We've already told the story of Jairus and his daughter; here was a man, well-known in his town, whose daughter is ill and no matter what he has tried there is no solution; nobody has been able to help and she is dying. Here is prominent man on his knees, lying at Jesus' feet, crying out for help. He is helpless, afraid, and doesn't know what else to do, but to ask Jesus. As we said before, Jesus went with Jairus and healed his daughter: "*Talitha Koum...*" (Mark 5:41) and she got up and Jesus healed her. In his helplessness, Jairus reached out to Jesus: he had heard about Jesus from others; there were lots of stories going the rounds about Jesus being able to heal people who were sick; Jairus believed these stories or at least was willing to give it a shot; he believed on the basis of what he had heard, that Jesus is able to help and heal

and, so in faith he reaches out; he feels personally helpless, but he believes Jesus. His faith is rewarded and his daughter is healed.

In between the two parts of that story there is another, a story of a woman who also feels helpless. Mark tells us that she has been ill for 12 years and that no-one has been able to help her so far. *"She had..." (Mark 5:26)* For 12 years this sense of helplessness had been building: "let's try another doctor", but that hadn't worked; "let's try one more" but that hadn't worked either; she was in danger of giving up altogether and resigning herself to permanent ill-health or even dying of her illness. No-one can help her. Then she too hears about Jesus: *"When she..." (Mark 5:27ff)* She hears that He heals people; she hears about other people who have gone to Jesus and He has healed them from all sorts of problems; it is worth a shot. But she wants to do this quietly and not make a fuss, so she hides in the crowd and when Jesus goes past on His way to Jairus' house, she simply touches His coat. As she does so, her bleeding stops and she is healed. It must have been a fantastic feeling for her; all that sense of helplessness is gone; she is healed.

That's not the end of the story, though. Jesus realises that something has happened: *"At once..." (Mark 5:30)* How did Jesus know this? We've no idea! But He felt something! The disciples thought He was mad; "so many people are touching you!" "Yes, but someone touched me specially, deliberately, not just bumping into me in the jostle of the crowd!" The woman came and owned up. Was she embarrassed? She had no need to be! She was frightened! Had she done the wrong thing? Would she be told off for what she had done? There were all kinds of emotions going through her mind as Jesus called her out! Yet, all He wanted to do was confirm what had happened to her: *"Daughter, your..." (Mark 5:34)* In her helplessness, she had believed that Jesus is able and she had put that faith into practice by coming to touch His clothes; her faith was rewarded and she was healed; she is helpless no more and her faith in Jesus had brought the blessing of God onto her life.

Jesus is clear: *"your faith..." (Mark 5:34)* Why make a fuss? Well, there was a danger of getting it wrong. She touched His clothes; were His clothes magic? Was it by touching His clothes that this woman was healed so that there was power in the clothes? But this is not magic; this is the power of God at work through Jesus and the connection between the power of God and the life of the woman in our story is her faith. There is a whole history in the Christian Church of relics: in the Middle Ages some churches had pieces of bone that were reputed to be from Jesus' body; or pieces of wood that came from His cross; or pieces of cloth that are reputed to have wrapped Jesus' body up after He died, the most famous being the Turin Shroud. These supposed relics were put in boxes for safe keeping and were kept in churches and people came to venerate these pieces; some of that history might just be dubious. But more than that, some of these relics were meant to have healing power and that by being in the presence of the relic, you might be healed; touching the relic might have special power. There is something of magic about that, something that almost seems to by-pass faith. It is not magic power in Jesus' coat that healed the woman, but her faith; her faith that believed Jesus could heal and her faith that trusted He would do good for her.

What is faith? If faith is the key to opening up all of these good things from God, what is faith? There are two parts to it: first of all, faith is about something to believe. Very simply, two people in our story believed something about Jesus. They believed that Jesus could heal; they had heard stories and they saw that these stories were true and so they believed something about Jesus, that He could heal; so they went to Him. What we believe about Jesus has become a little more sophisticated since then, but there are still some basic ideas that are most important. Christian faith is centred

on Jesus and on certain things about Jesus: He really did exist, though that is a matter of fact rather than faith; He died on a cross; He rose again from dead. These are of 1st importance; we believe that Jesus did exist, a real human being. But then it gets slightly more complex when we hear the New Testament tell us that Jesus is both a real human being and the Son of God, God become human; that is a serious jump in the faith-stakes and we have to work hard at times to understand what that means. Paul in 1 Corinthians would have us see that the cross is the place where God achieved our salvation and so we are asked to believe in Jesus, a crucified Saviour who dies that we might be forgiven our sins. There's more to add to all of that, but you get idea. Christian faith is something to believe about God, about Jesus, about the Church, about ourselves. We need that before we can go any further; Christian faith is not 'blind faith' as some suggest, nor a "believe what you like movement" but is a faith that begins to understand Jesus, that begins to know Him as the person in whom we believe and understands why Jesus is so significant.

The second part of faith is trust. This is more personal; faith is more than just head knowledge, but this takes us to heart, to trust someone. We understand things about Jesus so that we can trust Him. Two people in our story believed about Jesus that He could heal, but they then trusted Him to do that for them. We are asked to believe things about Jesus and that these things make Him the Saviour of the world, but we are then asked to trust Him to do this for us. The child stuck in the tree believes that Dad is able to catch him, but then needs to trust that when he jumps dad will catch him; that is an act of trust. We believe things about Jesus, but then we need that act of trust which commits our cause to Him, which trusts that He will do as He has promised, that He will save me! Two people in our story made that trust; they went to Jesus and trusted Him to listen to their story, to hear their case and to help them. Their trust was not disappointed! Neither will our trust be disappointed because Jesus is faithful.

Helplessness can lead us in two directions: it can lead us to despair, that there is no hope, no answer, nothing to do to remedy our situation; I've met people who walk that road and they see nothing other than black darkness ahead. Or it can lead us to look for a saviour, someone who is able to help us, someone who can bring our helplessness to an end. There is no better Saviour than Jesus. Two people felt that deep sense of helplessness, one for his daughter, the other for herself. They believed that Jesus could help; they believed He had power to heal. They put their trust in Him and they were not disappointed. Faith asks us to believe things about Jesus; faith asks us to trust Jesus. "I asked..." finishes: "I asked for all things that I might enjoy life, but I was given life that I might enjoy all things." Here is a man who has learned what faith means; God is able to answer our prayers and we believe that; God will answer our prayers in the best way and that is where we learn what trust means.