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**Mark 5 verses 21 – 43**

In today's reading from Mark's gospel we heard the story of two healing miracles performed by Jesus. Let's remind ourselves of the main points. Crowds were thronging around Jesus at the lakeside, when a ruler of the synagogue came pleading to Jesus to heal his daughter who was dying. So Jesus went with him, accompanied by the large crowd. While they were walking along, a woman who had been haemorrhaging ceaselessly for twelve years came up behind Jesus and deliberately touched the hem of his coat, believing that she would be cured. Immediately the bleeding stopped. Jesus was aware that power had gone out of him and asked who in the crowd had touched him. Trembling, the woman came forward and explained the reason for her action. Jesus said kindly: "Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace". As he continued on his way together with Jairus, they were met with the news that Jairus' daughter had died. "Don't be afraid; just believe", Jesus told Jairus. He entered the house and went with the parents to their daughter. Taking her by the hand, he said: "Talitha koum! Little girl, get up!" And she did so immediately. "Give her something to eat", Jesus said.

Stories of healing repeatedly shine out from the gospels! The gospel-writers make it clear that, together with teaching, healing constituted the main feature of the public activity of Jesus. In biblical times sickness was primarily understood as God's punishment for human sinfulness. You will recall that when the disciples met a man blind from birth they asked Jesus: "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" The gospel-writers portray Jesus as an outstanding healer whose powers often amazed the crowds. Jesus was a man of obvious charisma; he had magnetic appeal; he spoke with authority. However, he was not unique in possessing the power to heal. We know, not only from the New Testament, but also from other ancient literature, that healing was common practice in the time of Jesus. We know that Jesus encouraged his disciples to go out and cure the sick.

What's the significance of Jesus' healing ministry for us today? A crucial question indeed! But first of all, let's consider briefly what these stories would have meant to those who heard them for the first time. (Remember they were written forty years after the time of Jesus)

It's probable that, on hearing the story of the healing of Jairus' daughter, the discerning Jew, familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, might well have recalled a similar story in the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. There's a close parallel to the Jairus story in the Second Book of Kings, where Elisha restores the life of a child. The stories have so many similarities that the writer of Mark's gospel seems intent on revealing Jesus through the lens of Elisha, a hero from the Jewish past. In other words, Mark is making the point that Jesus was no ordinary man, he was as great as Elisha, as capable as the latter was of raising a child from the dead. An amazing man indeed! We read on

numerous occasions of people's astonishment as they witnessed Jesus' power to heal. Here was somebody very different from anyone they'd ever met before!

Here we are, two thousand years later, light years on in terms of our understanding of disease and medicine, unlikely to ascribe illness and disability as punishment from God. I find what the fourth gospel-writer, John, tells us about the miracles of Jesus *very helpful*. John tellingly refers to the miracles as *signs*, and signs point to something else! According to John, the first miracle took place at a wedding in Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine – a somewhat trivial event, but one which revealed Jesus' ability to transform something into something very different. The second miracle also took place in Cana, and it involved Jesus restoring a dying child to life. It is a story very similar to today's story of Jairus' daughter, except that in this case it's an official's son who is healed. "This was the second *sign*", says John. For John the miracles were signs pointing to Jesus' powers to transform. Jesus himself, on one occasion, referred to his healing ministry as a pointer. Do you remember when John the Baptist was in prison, he wrestled with doubts as to the identity of Jesus, and sent messengers specifically asking: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus responded: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up." Jesus was quoting Isaiah almost word for word, when the latter was predicting the coming of the kingdom of God. That's what these stories of transformation were about! They pointed to Jesus' ability to open people's eyes to God's kingdom on earth. In healing people of whatever illness or disability kept them from being whole, Jesus was enabling them to see the possibilities that a God-filled life had to offer. The woman whose faith impelled her to touch Jesus' cloak was transformed from the wretched woman that she was to a person enabled to become all that God wanted her to be! It's not difficult for us to imagine how her life was utterly changed, how the lives of the deaf were transformed when they could hear, the dumb when they could speak, the lame when they could walk, the blind when they could see!

We can understand blindness in more ways than one – as Jesus did. Do you recall how he accused the Pharisees, the religious people of his day, of being blind? "Woe to you, blind guides!" he said. "You blind men! You blind fools". They were the religious teachers, yet their eyes were closed to the important matters of their faith. Their strict observance of the law blinded them to the one law that mattered, the law of love.

When Jesus went into Jairus' house, he said to the mourners who were crying and wailing: "The child is not dead, she is asleep".

Is that what Jesus is saying to us today? "You are asleep! Your eyes are closed! It's time to wake up to the life I am offering you! You are only ten percent alive! Wake up to the possibilities of what you are meant to be! Each one of you is a son or daughter of God! You can be like me! You can be filled - one hundred percent filled - with the presence of God!

There is, of course a requirement. Think back to the gospel reading! In both incidents, it is noticeable that faith was a crucial element. Jairus came to Jesus in faith: "Please come and put your hands on her, that she might be healed." As for the woman with the life-draining haemorrhage, she was absolutely convinced that she would be healed if she could touch Jesus. It was her faith that healed her. Faith means trust, simple trust in the person who says and keeps on saying to us: "I have come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly".

I believe that, if we took Jesus at his word, we could rise up like eagles, to levels that we have never even imagined!

An image that helps me – and fascinates me -is the Allegory of the Cave in Plato's Republic, written some four or five hundred years before the time of Jesus. (If you want to read about the story, turn to Google and type in Allegory of the Cave.) In essence, Plato imagines a group of people who have spent all their lives in a dark cave, fettered, unable to move, with no idea of what lies outside. One day, one of them breaks free from his fetters, leaves the cave and discovers an utterly amazing world! He returns to his fellow-cave-dwellers, to tell them about life outside the cave, to release them from their fetters and lead them out into the new life. Plato then asks: "But will they believe him? Surely they'll think he's a crackpot! Some of them may even want to kill him, if he persists!"

Isn't that precisely the situation in which Jesus found himself all those years later? Jesus wanted to challenge the religious teachers who preferred the status quo. " You blind Pharisees!" he called the people who were to plot his downfall. Isn't Jesus' mission to free people, now as then, from whatever impedes them from living life to the full? May each one of us, in a quiet moment, take time to identify what may be preventing us from being all that God wants us to be. We may find we have to ask ourselves whether, with Jairus and the woman who touched Jesus' hem, we too can say: "Lord, I believe! Free me! Lead me!"  
AMEN!