

Fifth Sunday after Trinity 2018

Wis of Sol 1: 13 – 15; 2: 23 – 24; Mark 5: 21 – 43

Just think back to childhood stories, and I guess we can probably all think of examples of tiny people who summon up the courage to do something really audacious: there's the little goats confronting the troll as they trip trot over his bridge; there's Jack valiantly climbing to the top of the bean stalk; there's Gretel pushing the witch into the oven to save her brother, Hansel; and of course there's Oliver – perhaps the best example of all for our purposes – steeling himself to say to Fagan “Please sir, may I have more?” But none of these examples go anywhere near capturing the audacity of the woman who touches the hem of Jesus' cloak in this morning's readings.

So let's just take a moment to unpack her audacity to make sure that none of it passes us by, goes straight over her heads; because it's not just as straight forward

as someone coming up to me half way down Chapel Street and tugging on my sleeve to get my attention.

The first point is that this is a woman. And although there are still glass ceilings preventing women from achieving full equality; and there's wage inequality; and there are misogynistic assumptions made; and so forth; nevertheless it's difficult for us to take on board today just how totally disenfranchised women were in Jesus' day. Yet this is the second Sunday in a row when we've had a reading from the Gospels in which agency is given to a woman. This is dynamite. It's radical stuff.

But it's not any woman. This woman is someone who has lost everything she ever possessed. She had spent everything had and “endured much under many physicians.” But her condition had grown worse and her life was wasting away within her as well.

But it's more than just that. The condition which had driven to such lengths and such destitution was haemorrhaging. It was loss of blood. And the loss of blood made her ritually unclean. Now this really is something that is alien to our culture, so we need to pause and think about just how significant this was. Remember in the best known New Testament story of them all, the Good Samaritan, the Priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the road. Why do they cross over? Because they're on their way to the temple and they've made themselves ritualistically clean to do so. They couldn't risk coming into contact with the bloody mess of a victim of robbery. They couldn't touch him. They couldn't be defiled by him. They had to resist every altruistic urge within them. Because *the* most important thing above all else is to be ritualistically clean.

And this unclean, destitute woman has the audacity, the impudence, the effrontery to come out into public, into a crowd of people, to push her way through and to

approach, even to touch a rabbi. She broke every taboo in the book.

And just look at what happened as a result. Yes, I know, she was healed; but that's not the real point. I mean it's a happy ending to the story. She'd suffered for years; and now that's all over. So we're very happy for her. But the point is, by her being healed, the glory of Jesus is revealed. She was a witness to his divinity and caused Jesus to be proclaimed.

And that's how it happens. Jesus' glory, his power, his healing; Jesus is seen in action whenever he is put in contact with pain and suffering and filthiness and inequality and poverty and defilement and degradation and marginalisation. So if you want to see Jesus, the place to start looking is where there's pain and suffering and filthiness and inequality and poverty and defilement and degradation and marginalisation.

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

In the last few weeks we've been brought up short to be confronted once again by the horror of the Grenfell Tower disaster. First we saw the continuing pain and grief of those directly affected as the first anniversary of the fire was commemorated. Then this week, through reports of the Inquiry, we have seen graphic footage and accounts of the inferno that firefighters encountered as they began to tackle the blaze. We've been reminded, if we ever needed reminding, of the degrading and unsafe conditions in which those at the bottom of the social pile in 21st century Britain are consigned to live.

And where is God in all this? Where has God to be found in all this inequality and poverty, all this destitution and suffering, all this injury and grief? God's glory has been revealed, his power, his compassion, his healing has been revealed in the responses of the churches and mosques of North Kensington. It was the faith communities that got their hands dirty providing relief and support, comfort

and healing when the destitute came to them; just as Jesus got himself unclean when the woman came to him for healing.

When we come to worship each Sunday we bear before God our brokenness and inadequacies, our pain and our guilt. That means being honest with ourselves and with God about all our neuroses and peccadillos, all the things that keep us awake at night and we hope nobody else will ever find out about us. But we also come representatively on behalf of all society. We make intercession for the needs of our community and the world at large. We lay before God systemic injustice, inequality, brokenness, pain, marginalisation and all the rest of it. We offer all that to God for transformation through his love. We offer all that to God anticipating and expectant of seeing Jesus in action. We come with the faith of that woman to touch Jesus and to dare to hope. And that hope will not be disappointed.

Amen.