

**SERMON: 1 JULY 2018 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

**“JESUS HEALS IN RESPONSE TO FAITH - A TALE OF TWO DAUGHTERS”  
(Mark 5:21-43)**

There are two daughters in today's Scripture verses.

In v21-24 we hear the anguished cry of a father whose only daughter is at the point of death, the greek is, *estaktos*, the end of her time. Maybe she's been ill a long time, maybe 12 years. For she's only 12 years old, just like primary 7 or S1, on the brink of womanhood, for in Jewish thinking, girls became women the day after their twelfth birthday.

In v25-34 we meet another woman, this one, not at the end of her time, but at the end of her tether, having exhausted every possible remedy, and spent all she had, only for her condition to worsen. She's 12 too, in that she has suffered for 12 years, the pain that only a woman can experience. Maybe she had had a child. Maybe her child was 12.

Because there's something about birth here. The young girl was born 12 years ago. And this woman, has been bleeding for 12 years. Was something new about to be born in them both, and in their midst, a new kingdom coming, in power.

Power, that Jesus feels, going out from him, touching, healing, setting free, reversing the injustices of death and isolation and segregation and exclusion. And in the case of the bleeding woman, ending the social stigma of being unclean, not pure enough, not good enough.

The young girl and the woman are both daughters. Both are precious. Both matter greatly. And in both cases, faith is present - a desperate father's faith on behalf of his only daughter and a poor woman's faith, willing to take the risk of reaching out.

The Oxford Bible Commentary tells us that faith is a necessary pre-condition for miracles to happen.

Jairus, leader of the synagogue, believed. Enough to humble himself, humiliate himself before the crowd, enough to fall at the feet of Jesus. And even, when it seems the game was up, enough to go with him still, when words were not possible, to take the next small step, to follow this hope, this Lord, who had such confidence that it would be alright.

The bleeding woman believed. Enough to try this one last resort. Enough to brave a hostile crowd, mostly men likely. Enough to risk the wrath of the Jews, knowing she was unclean, and anything she touched, or sat on, would become unclean. And anyone who touched anything that she had touched would also make themselves unclean and not allowed anywhere near the synagogue. An outcast if ever there was one. Excluded from fellowship with others. Would there have been anyone who would have risked her company? Maybe. Maybe not. We don't know. I'd like to think so.

Just a touch would do it. Just a touch of the garment, not even of him. Just the edge, for a poor woman, herself very much out there on the edge.

Does Jesus care for those on the margins? You bet he does. Does he respond to desperate cries? You bet he does. Does he share his power with those who reach out to him? Absolutely. Does he care enough to die for the cause. Yep. Would he lay down his life for this young girl and this bleeding woman. Yep that's what he did. Job done. Does he intend for this sort of ministry to continue through those who'd dare to follow him? Totally. That's why we're here.

I wonder why he exposed the woman in the way he did. Did he want to show publicly that this outcast was a daughter of God? Yes he did. Did he want to appeal to Jairus, this leader of the synagogue which kept her at bay, himself a father of a needy daughter, that there was space in the kingdom, for this precious child? Yes he did. Jairus needed to hear that, before his own daughter was made well, when his heart was soft, when his guard was down, when there was space for the God of compassion to teach him a new way, and expand his view of the kingdom that Jesus had been speaking about and ushering in.

William Barclay in his commentary reckons that the synagogue ruler had to forget, or leave behind, three things. His prejudice, his dignity and his pride. He had to set aside his prejudice, because as the synagogue ruler he would have been under pressure to confirm that this Jesus was a dangerous heretic

who should not be allowed near the synagogue. Barclay reckoned the ruler was big enough to abandon his prejudice in this hour of need. Barclay defines prejudice as a judging beforehand, before, or without, examining the evidence. He wrote that few things have done more to hold things up than prejudice. Nearly every forward step has had to fight against the initial prejudice against it.

Barclay tells a great story to illustrate this. When James Simpson discovered the use of chloroform as an anaesthetic, especially for use in childbirth, chloroform was held to be “a decoy of Satan, apparently opening itself to bless women, but in the end hardening them, and robbing God of the deep, earnest cries, that should arise to Him in time of trouble”. He’s quoting a famous theologian who said that and concludes, that a prejudiced mind shuts out many a blessing.

I want to end with a story of a blessing we received this week when a vulnerable woman came to the church saying how great it was to see the doors of the church open. She said that she felt drawn by God to come to the church but every time she’d tried, the doors were firmly shut. I think not just physically. I think she had suffered a lot of rejection in the past and the church hadn’t always been there for her.

It would have been easy to let her walk by. But one of us, spoke to her and she talked about not feeling safe here. But as the conversation went on, it was obvious that she had a real trust in God and just needed to be told she was doing well, she was loved, and though she hadn’t always been obedient, who of us has? There was a spark there. The kingdom of God had come close. It was there between us as we sat in the cool of the shade on a glorious summer’s day. She too, was a very much loved daughter, of the God who made her, the one who gave his life for her, and who lives with her still. A story then, of not two daughters, but three.

In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom be all glory, now and forever.

(Prayer Ministry)