

I have had the most amazing, and yet in many ways overwhelming week. It has been so full with amazing things at times I have felt that I couldn't even breath! On Monday, I had a wonderful day with Mum and dad, and we even went to see 42nd Street at the Theatre; then parish and area life and been scattered with such a wide array of building and pastoral issues, then a rehearsal for an ordination, and then attendance at 2 ordinations, including one in Canterbury yesterday. Then of course there was the book festival yesterday as well. It really has been amazing and exciting – yet I found myself mid-week just wishing that there was 5 minutes that wasn't allocated to some task or some person. Then I felt guilty because I wanted space when I had all these wonderful things happening.

I suspect if not this week, at least at some point in our life we can resonate with this feeling of desiring 5 minutes space or in the quiet or without allocation.

The reason I hope we can connect with this feeling is that it relates very strongly to the situation that Jesus is in, in Mark's gospel as he is pushed repeatedly between the sea and crowds, unable to draw away to pray. In fact, one commentator suggested that we might be forgiven feeling like we were having déjà vu in the introduction to today's Gospel. Once again Jesus is in and near the sea and great crowds are gathered around him. In fact the sea and the crowds have shadowed Mark's narrative for the last several chapters. All of these events take place around the sea and amid the coming and goings of the crowds who continue to press in on Jesus and clamour for his attention. The crowds presence, the presence of the chaotic sea, the series of miracles, Jesus' teaching about the kingdom, and the sporadic commands to secrecy all press the issue of faith and create a sense of urgency, and also I suspect for Mark's Jesus – a desire to escape the throng!

And into the middle of this intense situation comes two of the most wonderful stories in the whole gospel – the woman who is haemorrhaging who dares to touch the hem of Jesus cloak, and Jarius and his daughter – the first to be raised from the dead!

The way that Mark tells this story amidst all the bustle and pressure- the woman (who is never given a name in any account of this story) interrupts the story, and also Jesus journey. Jesus response to the women at first seems harsh 'who touched me?'. This question must have seemed ridiculous to the immense crowd who were pressing in on Jesus. Even in her silence the women is demanding of Jesus, but rather than impatience Jesus responds quite differently.

Jesus may not know "who," but the woman certainly knows "what." In fear and trembling she falls down before Jesus and confesses the truth of what has happened to her. She had hoped for healing, but her hopes were far too small. The fear and illness that have defined her life still have their grip on her. She too is crowded and pressured – by her illness not the crowd. But Jesus' words give her more than she could ever have imagined. She is no longer just "a woman," but now is claimed as a "daughter," one whose "faith" has "made her well". She receives Jesus' benediction that invites her to leave in "peace" (shalom). And almost as an afterthought, Mark adds a 'by the way'; she has been healed of her disease (Mark 5:34).

This interaction which starts out as unknown person who is trapped captures a sense of the known and brings liberation. An invisible unnamed woman becomes a

daughter. This is a vital part of the picture of the kingdom of God which Mark is attempting create. In the Kingdom of God – no one, regardless of their need – should be unseen. As we seek to be Christ’s Ambassadors this is also the challenge to us – that we take the time to notice those who are invisible to society and respond to their needs. It is this ‘being seen’ which is a central part of the gift which God is offering us. For us, as it was with Jesus, we may have to centre ourselves and look past those who are the most visible, or making the most noise – their need may not be as great the one invisible and who dares to reach out.

So now that the woman is healed and seen –she moves away – but the crowd do not stop pushing in – and so now we return to the encounter with Jarius. Unlike the woman, Jarius has a name, status, position and is seen – and yet he too pushes into the middle of the crowd reaching out for Jesus help. Note the symbolism here – both the visible and invisible within society seek out Jesus, both the weak and the strong recognise the authority which Jesus has. Both the perceived weak and strong reach out in fear. Like our readings last week – these stories pulls us back to the strong relationship between faith and fear. Jesus says

“Do not fear, only believe”. These words however in some ways fail to communicate the substance of what Jesus is trying to say to Jarius and to us. If the command is “do not fear,” then it is already too late, and does not address the leader’s reality. The problem at the point is, he is already consumed by fear, and the prospect of faith remains too distant. It should rather be read as something like “Stop being afraid,” and “Go on living by faith.” The present tense of both verbs calls attention to the transforming power of Jesus’ word to change our lives from fear to trust, a transformation in which the prospect of life and salvation now appears in a wholly new dimension.¹ As we discussed last week – it is hard to perceive love and hope when we are driven by our fear.

Jarius is fearful of reaching out to Jesus, but also fearful of what is happening to his daughter and Jesus is trying to address this. Fear will not address the issue – faith will. And so Jesus draws them all away –he creates space so that the pushing and demands of the crowd (or even the sea) no longer have control of the situation. This is a wonderful image of what the picture of the Kingdom of God Jesus is trying to give us – to bring space to the chaos, to bring calm and faith to our fears – to bring hope when we feel like we have no breath left in us.

Jesus transforms this situation. He brings life to two people who had no life. A woman shunned for 12 years, and girl who had only known 12 years of life. Jesus’ life, along with his death, grants life-changing healing. It is a healing authority that crosses boundaries, both ethnic and gender. Jesus chooses not to leave people in the conditions in which he finds them. ²

What condition did Jesus find us in and how have we changed? What condition does God find us in now and how might we be transformed in the future?

There are many issues confronting our community and society, as well us as individuals. In many of these issues theme of who is seen and unseen, of those who live in fear and those who seek to live with faith that it can be different, of

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2471

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1323

those who seek to transform the situation. These are issues which are not separate from our Christian faith rather they are central to it. Questions of how we respond to others, how we confront violence, how we name that there are global issues which seem complicated beyond perceivable resolution, how we respond to economic crisis or poverty; how we talk about our difference and desire to be the people we are created to be. How we confident in our faith.

Every day in our world there are incredible conversations of faith in our world, conversations of courage, celebration of voices given to those who have no voice. They happen every day – but we need to notice them.

Like image that Mark creates in the Gospel – all these issues can push in on us like a crowd, or demand of us like pounding waves so we want to escape. They might even leave us with a sense of fear. But the readings we have heard today remind us that amidst all the pushing and demands, there is space, there is hope, and there is faith. For even in the crowd, when the unknown and known reach out for help – God sees, responds and names us – in a way that will bring life, and we compelled to do like wise.

This is the hope of our faith. And in this hope we have life.

Amen.