Today our in our Gospel reading from Mark 5 we encounter Jesus as he is pushed repeatedly between the sea and crowds, unable to draw away to pray. Once again Jesus is in and near the sea and great crowds are gathered around him. For the last few chapters, the 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. It feels in many ways like one of those days when you might want to cry out – ‘Oh for 5 minutes peace!’

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 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).

Within this interaction, we glimpse the steadfast love which we heard described earlier in Lamentations. A love which is larger than the pain of a situation or a time and offers a welcome hope. 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. A place is possible which transcends the pain described in Lamentations or experienced by this women – Jesus is heralding a new experience of God’s kingdom in which the invisible are seen, and pain is lifted. One of our key roles as a Christian community should always be to ask or notice who is missing, who is invisible and work to rectify this. It is ‘being seen’ which is a central part of the gift which God is offering to all – that all are valued in God’s sight.

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 pull 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.[[1]](#footnote-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.

You may be able to think of a time in your own life when it was the drawing away, the creating space, or removing yourself from the hustle and bustle gave you time to breath. This is the space Jesus is creating for Jarius as well; and in this space Jesus is able to heal the little girl.

Jesus transforms the 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 chooses not to leave people in the conditions in which he finds them. [[2]](#footnote-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 the 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 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 a global pandemic, environmental crisis or poverty; how we talk about our difference and desire to be the people we are created to be. How we are confident in our faith.

Every day in our world there are incredible conversations of faith, conversations of courage, celebration of voices given to those who have no voice. And we are invited to notice.

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.

*For the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end.*

Amen.

1. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\_id=2471 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\_id=1323 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)