

1. Illness is a great leveller. It doesn't matter who you are, how much money you have, the truth is: none of us can avoid the risk of illness, nor can we say who will or won't be afflicted.

And I think most of us realise that and show sympathy and empathy when we see someone – no matter who – suffering with a horrible illness. In the 2000s, Gordon Brown was Finance Minister and then Prime Minister of UK, part of a Labour government. You may have liked or disliked his policies and politics. But I never heard one person not show some sympathy when it was revealed that his first daughter died of a brain haemorrhage in 2002, and then one of his sons was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis in 2006. It didn't matter their political persuasion; no-one I knew felt anything but sympathy for him in that regard.

So today's gospel reading evokes sympathies in us (at least, I hope it does!). A woman, who has been suffering for years. A father, and his daughter who is dying. Very different people. But they are all levelled by suffering.

2. That is the first thing that stands out to me today. Mark has cleverly woven two healing events (the woman, the daughter) in a way which reveals that Jesus cares for all. He knows: they are all levelled by suffering.

The woman is so different to Jairus the synagogue leader. The woman is, well, yes, a woman (less important than a man, in their culture!), she is unnamed (Jairus has a name!), she has no status (Jairus is part of the elite), she is ritually unclean according to Jewish law (he leads worship in the holiest places), she is poor having spent all she had on trying to get better (he is well off), she has begun to live with an expectation of sickness (he would expect to live a healthy life, and his family). The difference could not be more stark!

How does Jesus respond? Does he favour one or the other? At the end of the day, no! Once the events have completely unfolded, we are thrilled: Jesus has cared for both. Does that not tell us yet again: whoever you are, don't worry – you are loved? If you feel lowly – you are loved! If you feel well off, you are loved!

3. But another thing I want to explore is how anxiety and trust play out in this story

In the first scene, there is a lot of anxiety. The woman is anxious. She has been suffering for years. In fact, her attempts to find a cure have made her condition get worse and she is poorer for it. But she is fearful of being seen or noticed. People probably recognise her and they would shun her: she was unclean. Carrying her anxiety, she nevertheless continues walking towards a better future – which she trusts can happen if she just touches this healer's cloak. It's a desperate act from a place of anxiety and despair – and last-ditch trust.

Actually, there's probably some anxiety in the crowd. If anyone did know her, they might want to make sure they don't touch her: she is unclean and will make them unclean if they touch her. Keep clear, they might say! But they can't, because the crowd is pressing in.

There is anxiety on the part of the disciples. They thought he was on a mission to Jairus' house. And so they respond (I cannot help hearing anxiety in their response) - when he asks who touched him – by saying 'come on, how can you ask that, you can see everyone's in a crush here!?' I wonder if they aren't saying. 'Come on, prioritise: the Synagogue's leader is unwell, this is a great marketing opportunity, stick to the programme!'

Now back to the woman. Jesus calls her out. She is now in fear - she has made a rabbi unclean. Trembling, she spills the beans. What will he say?

His response: 'Go in peace, your trusting has made you well!' Jesus declares peace in the swirls of anxiety.

But now, the anxieties for Jairus ramp up. Reports come his daughter has now died. The worst he had feared has come true – he must be devastated. His beloved daughter is no more! Jesus says, 'Do not fear, only trust!' There are two ways you can say 'don't fear!' You could be meaning: 'I know you are already in fear, stop it!' Or it could mean: 'Don't start fearing now!' (i.e. you were OK before, don't start fearing now with this latest news). The Greek suggests it is the first meaning: Jesus knows they have been wracked by fear all along, and he says 'Stop fearing, trust!'

At every moment, Jesus is bringing peace to those anxiously around him. He is calling for trust at the most anxiety provoking moments of people's lives.

It is very difficult to remain a calm person when all those around you are anxious. It starts to get to you. It starts to eat at you. And there is a parallel here with the Jewish laws of impurity. The basic understanding was: some stuff is unclean, so don't touch it or you will become unclean yourself. Actually, we might think that is archaic but we are not so different. We avoid spending time with someone 'because I don't want to be seen with them' (it will mar our status). Or we avoid people because they make us feel worse ('I don't like spending time with them, they get me down, or they make me feel small etc').

The amazing thing about Jesus is that the 'energy' flows the other way. Rather than becoming 'unclean' himself, his 'cleanness' flows outwards to the suffering woman and the dead/dying child. We fear (and rightly so at times) that exposure to some experiences will contaminate us and darken us, like a drop of black colouring into a pot of white paint – we can't get it back to white again! But Jesus' effect seems more to be more like those stain removers – I don't want to sound crass – which somehow amazingly shift the dirt.

The truth is, we are fragile but these narratives tell us that standing close to Jesus can strengthen us and make us whole, both as individuals and as a community. I am not suggesting we take careless risks, but this does tell me: if we want to be a church who is indeed a light to the world.... If we want to be people – individuals, a community – who can bring peace to the places around us – then we need to 'stand' close to Jesus if we are to have a hope.

4. Jesus is no longer walking around in our presence today! So can that be true for us today? Well I think that leads us to the final part of the reading today

After all this intense human experience, Jesus tells them to keep quiet about all that has happened. It is part of what we know as the dilemma of the 'Markan secret.' That is, Jesus often told people to say nothing about some seemingly amazing thing. Why? We could spend much time on this. But at the simplest level, it seems as if he is saying, 'This is not the main event.... Don't distract people until they can see the full picture!' And what is that 'full picture'? It is his death and resurrection: the ultimate affirmation that he is, indeed, worthy of following through time and history.

We might not be able to 'touch' Jesus here today. But we can learn to live into the truth that he can change us and the world. And it is through God's Spirit that this can be known by us *today*. How can you learn to live 'closer' to Jesus so that his power can move out through you? It is a lesson I am continually having to learn and re-learn. I will leave it for you to ponder how. For if we can live closer to Jesus, as I mentioned last Sunday, we can start knowing a deeper peace within ourselves. And we can have some hope of being peacemakers and a positive healing influence for good in the world around us.