

Prayer

Introduction ...

I wonder what title you would give to that Gospel passage?

If we weren't still in Covid restrictions – I'd ask you to chat about it and come up with some ideas.

But is anyone willing to volunteer a possibility? (*several volunteered ideas*)

Some good thoughts there ... good ideas for future sermons!!

Two possible titles came to me as I prayerfully prepared for today ...

The first probably because today is the first Sunday since Sam's ordination as a priest – a further step into service, ministry and leadership as an ordained member of the Church of England:

The title: '**Ministry with Interruptions**'

One experienced Vicar said – ordained ministry is all about learning how to use the odd 10 minutes here and there – because there are so many interruptions – and, actually, I wouldn't want to limit that to ordained ministry either – true for all of us.

How did Jesus deal with the interruption in today's gospel ... and also how do you think Jairus might have been reacting to the interruption? As Mark, in writing this Gospel, so clearly links the two narratives of healing into one combined narrative – he is wanting us to consider the links and the interruption – which brings me to my second possible title:

'**The tale of the two daughters**' – and here, I'll draw at times on the writing of Debie Thomas.

The two daughters:

One, a little girl on her deathbed, with an influential father to advocate for her. The other, an impoverished woman whose long illness has pushed her to the margins of society. Between them? Jesus. Jesus the healer. Jesus the restorer. Jesus, the scandalous and "unclean" boundary-crosser.

Like many stories in the Gospels, this one begins on the beach. Jesus and his disciples have just re-crossed the Sea of Galilee from the Decapolis. They've hardly stepped off the boat when Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, pushes *his* way through the crowd, falls at Jesus's feet, and begs Jesus to heal his twelve-year-old daughter. Jesus agrees. As he, his disciples, and Jairus make their way to the synagogue leader's house, a woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years pushes *her* way through the crowd, stretches out her hand, and surreptitiously touches Jesus's cloak.

And Jesus stops: imagine what that must have felt like to Jairus ... especially when – as Jesus is still speaking to the woman – he's told that now it's too late; his daughter has died.

Imagine what some of the disciples might have been feeling too – here was a chance to impress the leader of a synagogue – and Jesus stops to pay attention to an outcast unclean woman.

But Jesus knows that **this** second daughter has spent twelve long years having other people impose their narratives on her. Their interpretations, their assumptions, their prejudices. Shamed into silence by bad religion. Denied the spiritual nourishment and empowerment that is her birthright as a child of God. She needs someone to listen, to understand, and to bless her “whole truth” in the presence of the larger community.

So this is what Jesus does — **even when** time is of the essence, and he has essential work to do elsewhere. **He stops.** He pauses to restore a broken woman to fellowship, dignity, and humanity. He insists that her embodied experience is no less important than a synagogue leader's. He doesn't allow her to slink away into obscurity; he invites her to bear witness, to find her voice, to speak publicly and confidently about her story and God's. “Daughter,” he says when she at last falls silent. “Daughter, go in peace.”

Only then does he move on with Jairus. And it's not only the timing of the incidents that connects the two healings.

Two daughters. Two references to “twelve years.” Two people who push through physical barriers (a teeming crowd), and religious taboos (the synagogue's expectations of its leaders, and a culture's rules around uncleanness), to reach Jesus.

Thinking of Jairus again:

Jairus, an enforcer of the synagogue's religious taboos — complicit in the woman's isolation and suffering. I wonder if he experiences a leveling, a reordering of who is “in” and who is “out” in God's economy. I wonder if he flinches when he realizes that the woman has made Jesus unclean by touching him and that Jesus then proceeds straight to Jairus's house anyway, bringing his “uncleanness” with him. I wonder if Jairus learns something about the danger of religious taboos. The importance of women's voices. The healing power of compassion.

We don't know — but I hope so. I hope that Jairus embraced a new vision of who God is, and what God values. In Jairus' story, Jesus demands that we not see death where he sees life. In the bleeding woman's story, he demands that legalism give way to love. In each story, Jesus restores a lost child of God to community and intimacy. In each story, Jesus embraces what is “impure” (the menstruating woman, the dead body) in order to practice mercy. In each story, a previously hopeless daughter “goes in peace” because Jesus isn't a pronouncer of death; he is a giver of new life.

Conclusion

So what might God be saying to each of us in our daily lives of discipleship – including Sam in his calling as a priest – but not limited to him?

Will we aim to discern when an interruption is actually a prompting of the Spirit – and respond positively – no matter what others may think?

Will we have as much, if not greater, concern for those who are outsiders as for those we already know? The model of the Church of England is that we are here for the whole community – and not only those who come through the church door.

And: What is “asleep” in us that Jesus might awaken? What do we have to push through in order to grab hold of God's boundless compassion? What hierarchies, taboos, and skepticisms stand in our way? What is our “whole truth,” and when will we find the courage to tell it?

These are ancient and ever-living questions. They are *our* questions. May we ask them, face them, love them, and live into them.

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<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay>