

## PRAYER

***Father may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us into the living word, Jesus Christ our Lord - Amen***

## SERMON

It is a hot sunny day and the crowd makes the heat even more oppressive. Hundreds of bodies jostle and push, desperately trying to reach the man. You are short and you cannot see above the mass of limbs. The mob propels you forward. You hide your face in shame and in fear, because you carry a terrible secret. You are bleeding, you are polluted and contaminated. Every one of those arms, shoulders and elbows that jostles you by touching you has become unclean. If they knew each one of those people would have to ritually wash and cleanse themselves. Their day would be practically over. They would be furious with you. Had you not learned years ago that it was best to stay on the edge of a crowd, to be on the fringes of society? Twelve years of discrimination and abuse had taught you how dangerous this was. A crowd whipped up by the excitement of a miracle worker in their midst, could so easily turn into an angry mob, furious that you had knowingly contaminated them.

It was a brave, foolhardy, risk to take, to knowingly push you way through this crowd, aware that every body that bumped into you was a potential attacker. But you had to reach him. After twelve years of doctors failed advice and suffering, this man could save you, not only from the illness but also from the misery of your life. You don't need to speak to him, you are scared to draw attention to yourself. All you have to do is touch him, quietly, silently, no one would notice, not even him. You believe in him absolutely.

You almost reach him, then a sudden commotion. An official shoves his way through the crowd, almost knocking you over. His daughter is dead and he cries out for help. The crowd shifts, eager to follow to see a miracle. In desperation and in faith you touch the corner of the rabbi's cloak, miserable that you have contaminated him by your touch, confident in your healing because of his touch, even if it was just the corner of his cloak.

This is just two verses in our reading this morning, two verses in the midst of a far more dramatic story – raising a child from the dead. Two verses that can so easily be overlooked. This woman was an outcast, a despised second-class citizen, inconsequential, and an irritating interruption in a far more exciting story. A bit player in the bigger story. But she is not inconsequential to Jesus. ***"Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.***

Just think of that woman's fear and desperation as she pushed though that crowd. It was faith that drove her onwards, at some personal risk and faith that rescued her.

Faith in Christ is at the heart of our reading today. Faith for that desperate woman and faith that drove an important synagogue official, a man of some standing in the community, to abandon all dignity and run to this itinerant troublemaker, a man despised by his bosses. Faith in Christ that he could heal his daughter. In those days it was the custom to hire mourners to lament the dead, hence the noisy crowd and flute layers when they arrived at the house. Imagine you were one of those flute players, on a hired job. Always a sad business when a child dies, but to play is what you are paid to do. Out of the crowd comes this dishevelled man who says the girl is only sleeping. What would you have done, you've already seen the corpse? Would you have laughed when

Jesus said the child was only sleeping Yet amidst all of that strident show for grief was a father and a mother deeply mourning the loss of their child and a belief in this man that he could bring their child back to them. ***After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. News of this spread through all that region.*** If you were a flute player laughing at the Nazarene, what would you think now? How would you feel now? You were only bit player in the story but perhaps Jesus has touched you, perhaps it is the stirring of faith.

These stories are of faith, strong faith, wavering faith, new faith, faith against the odds, faith in Christ, faith in God. But what of our faith? Sometimes our faith is like a comfortable old winter coat that we put on to protect us from the chill of the world, but it needs to be so much more. Could we have been able to fly in the face of popular belief, stand up to the leaders of our organization, the high-ranking Jewish officials who detested and ridiculed this teacher from Nazareth. If the expected code of behavior, the peer pressure of the day is to sneer at Christ, or simply ignore him, is our faith strong enough to stand up to peer pressure? Can we abandon all sense of dignity and pride in the firm belief that he can raise our daughter from the dead?

On the edge of our world, despised, outcast, avoided, discriminated against; do we have the courage to push through a hostile mob to touch the cloak of Jesus? Is our faith strong enough to take that hugely personal risk to reach out to Christ in the firm belief that he can heal us?

We would all like to say yes and none of us are in the position of those people, bit players in the bible, short two or three verse stories of ordinary men and woman with tremendous faith. But are we not all bit players in God's world? Perhaps we are a verse or two in the bigger picture of Christ in 2026. Looking back at this father and mother, this outcast woman, are they so very different from us in their loss and grief, fear and pain? We have so much in common with these people, we feel what they felt.

We **are** all bit players in God's world. I pray we have the strength of faith of those bit players described in Mathew 2000 years ago this day and every day.

AMEN