

PROPER 08 B

Two Women and Their Stories

As we consider the stories of these two women

that we have heard in today's Gospel reading,

I am wondering what they might be evoking in us?

In what ways are they putting us in touch with our own stories?

What is it that brings Jairus to make his supplication?

His young, 12-year-old daughter is at the point of death,

in extremis, we would say.

It is her desperate plight that drives her father

to search out the one who can heal her.

Who among us has not been driven,

would be driven, in the same way to exhaust every possibility

to find help for one of our own?

The condition of his daughter may indeed carry with it

pain and suffering for her, but it gives rise to

a different yet related pain and suffering that Jairus also feels

and that we would feel too.

It is difficult enough to bear when an older person faces death,
but how much more so when a young girl
at the threshold of becoming a woman,
with all the potential that holds,
seems about to be cut off before her time.

It is from such depths that Jairus calls out.

It is this that brings him to his knees
before this one who proclaims the good news of God
to beg for his help.

"My little daughter is at the point of death.

Come and lay your hands upon her,

so that she may be made well, and live."

"...Out of the depths have I called!"

And what of the woman who has been losing blood for 12 years?

That short but packed description says it all:

She had endured much under many physicians,
and spent all she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse.
Her predicament was not just one of having an incurable disease,

but also, one of being permanently unclean.

Indeed, according to the Levitical law,
she was not only unclean herself,
but polluted everyone and everything with which she came in contact.

For 12 years (the life span of Jairus' daughter)
she had suffered not only her distressing disease,
but also, the painful separation from the congregation
of the holy people of God.

We can well understand how she had been willing to risk all she had
in order, if she only could, to find relief.

But all this had been to no avail.

Here she is, ill, isolated, and destitute as well,
such are the depths to which she has sunk,
and out of which she now calls out.

But unlike the openness of Jairus' supplication
hers will be silent, hidden, an invisible action.

Even her story is hidden in the story of Jairus and his daughter.

Her life had during these past 12 years been lived
in isolation and anonymity.

She has had to withdraw and remain hidden.

So, it is that she approaches Jesus on the blind side.

She had heard about Jesus, Mark tells us,

and so, she comes in the crowd behind him.

Her prayer will be a secretive act.

If I but touch his clothes I will be made well.

“...Out of the depths have I called!”

But who is this one whom both Jairus and the woman seek out?

What is it about this man Jesus

that would give them cause for hope?

Mark would have us ask such questions as these.

After all, hasn't he punctuated his telling of the story

of the good news of Jesus right from the beginning

with the reactions of those who were present

and saw and heard what Jesus said and did.

They were astounded at his teaching,

for he taught them as one having authority.

What is this? A new teaching – with authority!

He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.

They were all amazed and glorified God, saying,

"We have never seen anything like this."

"Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

.... and everyone was amazed."

Mark portrays Jesus at the beginning of his story

as coming into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God.

The kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the good news.

What this means is that the reality of how God rules,

of how God acts towards us,

of how God's loving purpose impinges upon us

and even now in the words and actions of Jesus

breaks into our lives to transform them.

Just as the lives of the two women were transformed

in their encounter with Jesus,

so Mark would want us to encounter this same Jesus

that our lives also may be transformed.

And just as the good news for both the woman and for Jairus was,

that their call from the depths reached one who would respond

and who would respond in a measure far beyond their expectation,
so, also, may it be for us.

The woman expects to be healed without being touched, noticed,
or even having to mention her plight. And, indeed, she is healed,
even as she reached out and touched Jesus' garments.

But far beyond her expectation, Jesus not only stops and notices her,
he calls her out of her isolation and hiding into the community.

He brings her out of the background into the foreground.

His question, ***“Who touched me...”***

is not to condemn her for her secrecy but to accept her.

It is not to demean her or to embarrass her

but to acknowledge and to appreciate her.

It is to restore her dignity and worth as a daughter of Israel.

When Jesus finally gets to Jairus' house

it would seem, that he is too late.

As they say, while there is life there is hope.

But some people came from the house and said to Jairus,

“Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher further?”

But Jesus says to Jairus, ***“Do not fear, only believe.”***

To the mourners he says,

“Why do you make a commotion and weep?

The child is not dead but sleeping.”

And then finally to Jairus' daughter, he says,

“T'lita, koomi” which means ***“Little girl, get up.”***

The girl responds immediately, she wakes up and **rises** (***aneste***, the same word that is used later to describe the rising of Jesus).

Mark tells us that all who witnessed this

they were overcome with amazement.

The woman had been suffering from a flow of blood for 12 years.

If blood in the Jewish tradition represented the life of a living being, then, here was her life draining away.

Her womanhood was being lost and wasted.

She finds her way to Jesus, for in him she intuitively sees the fulfilment of her longing for restoration.

In a great act of faith, she reaches out to touch his garment and immediately the flow of blood ceases.

Her life is restored to its fullness

as he calls her back into her rightful place as a daughter of Israel.

And so, she is able to go in peace,

even as he bade her, peace – **shalom**,

carrying with it as it does

the meaning of healing, wholeness and blessedness.

Jairus' daughter is 12 years old, a clear signal

of the Jewishness of the moment.

Being 12 was significant because it meant in that context

that a girl had become a woman.

She had reached marriageable age.

Here she was meant to be entering upon her womanhood

with all its wonderful potential of intimacy, relationship and life,

but instead, she is isolated, cut off and alone.

She is a girl in need of being awoken

into the potential of womanhood,

and when she hears Jesus' summons to awaken and rise,

her response is immediate.

She rises and walks around, very much alive to her full potential.

How might this woman with the bleeding touch our experience?

She is a person of intuition and faith

who out of the depths in which she finds herself,

but which, she has not allowed to overwhelm

or, to quenched her spirit, she is drawn to Jesus.

She sees in him something new, something vital, a cause for hope.

She trusts her intuition.

Hers is a kind of wisdom and insight

which goes beyond the rational and transcends it.

She reaches out from the depths

in hope to make a connection with the source of life.

Her faith in Jesus becomes a faith that makes her well.

What she has seen in Jesus,

what she has heard and how she has felt she trusted herself to.

Is there something of this that we become aware of in ourselves,

something that is perhaps hidden

that might even now prompt us

to reach out to touch the source of life?

Is there something that perhaps needs to be brought from its hiding

into the open, from the background to the foreground?

What the woman came to realize through what Jesus said to her
was a new belief in herself as the daughter of God.

It may be then that we might hear him say,

“Daughter, your faith has made you whole. Or,

Son, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace, shalom.”

And how does the child touch our experience?

Who indeed is this child on the verge of growing up
but sick or asleep or dying? Something is wrong.

Instead of forging ahead and embracing her full potential
she is cut off isolated.

What is there that needs to be reconnected, awakened,
brought back to life in us?

What is there in us that would hear Jesus say,
child get up, and would respond?

What is there that is cut off, that longs to be reconnected,
that is sick, asleep, or dying, that longs for life?

Hear then the Lord of life say, ***“Aneste” “Get up, arise.”***

Amen.