

Reflection

High Street Uniting Church Frankston

Sunday 27 June 2021

Keith Holmes

Read: Mark 5: 21-43

**O Lord our God,
you have given your word
to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.
Grant us grace to receive your truth in faith and love,
that we may be obedient to your will and live always for your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

The writer of the book of Revelation has at one point a most vivid and personal picture of the universality and openness and persistence of the love of God in Christ, **“Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if any hear my voice and open the door, I will come into their house and eat with them, and they will eat with me.”**

But opening the door is not always such a simple matter. Most of us are at times uncertain about ourselves, about others, about how God could possibly be interested in us. The question for some is, “How do I know God loves me?” For some, their personal feelings of unworthiness in the eyes of God, either coming from within themselves or being told they are unworthy by society or even some other Christians, creates a barrier which is very difficult to break. For others, their feelings of insignificance lead them to think things like “Why should I bother God, or why should God be bothered with me, when there are too many other more compelling things to be taken care of?”

Some of us have had personal experience of the love of God, bringing healing and peace, and in that sense “we know God loves us”. Others, some we would consider most unlikely, have had dramatic meetings with the risen Christ, starting of course with Saul on the road to Damascus. More recently, the avowed atheist C.S. Lewis in his study at Magdalen College, and someone whose story I came across a couple of months ago, the French philosopher and prolific writer, and eventually Christian mystic, Simone Weil.

She was born in the early twentieth century into a secular family and raised in complete agnosticism. She first had a number of spiritual experiences in her late twenties, culminating in a powerful revelation at the age of twenty-nine. She was reciting George Herbert’s poem, Love III, when in her own words, “Christ came down and took possession of me”, after which she embraced Christianity.

Again, for most us, dramatic personal experiences are outside our own experience. Our journey of faith has its ups and downs; two steps forward one step backwards. But this journey of faith is enriched by being members of a faith community. But ultimately it is enriched by our journey with Christ.

There was a long article on faith in the February edition of Crosslight, put together by the editor Stephen Acott in which he drew together many contemporary perspectives on faith by people both within and outside the Uniting Church.

He quotes the spiritual writer Richard Bohr, an American Catholic priest, “Faith is not an intellectual acceptance of God, or believing certain doctrines to be true. Sharing in the faith of Jesus is a much richer concept. It means we are all participating – with varying degrees of resistance and consent – in the faith journey that Jesus has already walked”. He goes on to say that “faith is a personal and relational stance in life. It has much more to do with trust and relating and engaging than it has to do with the traditional focus on belief.”

Someone else talks about faith being “trusting in God’s promises. Faith is trusting we are who God says we are”.

Paul writing to the Colossians says about Christ, **“He is the image of the invisible God. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”**. Christ’s ministry reveals to us the nature of God. His ministry was both his teachings and parables, but also his interactions with people. It is particularly in these interactions that we can develop a trust that the nature of God is revealed, that the love of God is real.

Today’s gospel reading tells us about Christ and the nature of the love of God, and it tells us something about ourselves in the human reactions of the woman and Jairus, and how both had to overcome personal obstacles to open the door to Jesus.

Mark has woven together the stories of Jesus’ encounters with a number of people, highlighting both connections and differences. Both encounters are about fear and faith and the power of Jesus to take people from one to the other. Both are about a desperate need and resolution of that need through trust in Jesus. Part of the point of the gospel story, and of this whole section of Mark, is precisely that the life-giving power of God is breaking into and working through the ordinary details of life.

This section bears all the hallmarks of coming from an eyewitness account – the disciples reacting as if Jesus was asking a silly question, the people laughing at Jesus outside Jairus’ house. But most particularly, the remembered Aramaic words “Talitha koum” “Little girl, I tell you to get up” embedded in the Greek of the gospels. Aramaic was the ordinary everyday language of Jesus and the disciples, but Koine Greek was the lingua franca of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. It must have made a particular impression to be retained.

Let’s look more closely at the people involved in the account.

Jairus was an important and respected person in the local community. As a leader of the synagogue, he would have been a bit like an office holder of the elders or the church council. Given Jesus had already upset religious officials in Galilee with such things as his healing of a man in a synagogue on the Sabbath, Jairus would normally have been wary in approaching Jesus. He would have had to set aside prejudice, dignity and pride as he fell at Jesus’ feet and begged him to help his daughter. In the end, he had enough faith in Jesus for he and his wife to go with Jesus into the room where their daughter lay, supposedly having died.

At times, I think many of us can identify with Jairus, either in ourselves or someone we know well. Many have difficulty seeking help because we think we know better, or are too proud, or are unsure of the source of the help. In approaching God, we may be deterred by our doubts or our own limited understanding of what God is like, or even what we are told about God by some religious figures.

There will also be those of us who identify with the woman. Here was someone who had been marginalised because of her illness. Not only had she suffered the physical effects, but under the prevailing religious views, had been labelled unclean for twelve years, and so was regarded as unfit to approach God or join in any religious gathering. Anyone who touched her was also regarded as being contaminated and also unclean. There is a whole chapter in Leviticus devoted to what were regarded as unclean bodily discharges, and this was followed so closely that menstruating women were forbidden to enter even the outer precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem.

So, it was no wonder she was so tentative in approaching Jesus in stark contrast to the direct approach of Jairus. She had to go against all her experience of being shunned and rejected. There must have been something she sensed about Jesus. The account says **“She had heard about Jesus”**.

Mark’s gospel records previous encounters of Jesus with marginalised people. Earlier in Jesus ministry in Galilee, he had been approached by a leper, someone else who was regarded as unclean and also to be shunned and rejected. As Mark writes: **“Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him”**.

The woman would have heard enough about Jesus to have enough trust or faith in him to be able to say, **“If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well”**.

When we are dispirited, wracked by doubt, feel insignificant in the pecking order of society, made to feel unworthy, we can but put our trust in the God that Christ has revealed. We too can reach out to touch him, confident that this trust is the channel through which Jesus’ power can work.

Let us pray:

**Now to the One
who is able to do far more abundantly
than all that we ask or think,
to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
to all generations for ever and ever.**