

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

27<sup>th</sup> June 2021 – Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

**MARK 5:21-43**

**FAITH FULL COMPASSION**

Have you ever prayed really, really, hard for something, or, more likely, for someone? That kind of prayer which is an open pouring out of your request to God. It's not just a fleeting 'Please God, ...' but prayer which consumes and dominates your thoughts even if you have to be doing something else at the same time. It might feel like an act of desperation, but as I've reflected on my experiences of this kind of prayer this week, I would probably say it is more about hope. When you can't do anything else, all you can do is turn to the One in whom you have hope.

Many of you can probably think of a number of occasions when you have turned to God in prayer in that way. For me there are two times which always come to the fore when I think of this. The first was in 1994 when my grandmother in Toowoomba, Dad's mother, was having a heart operation. This was just a few months before Karen and I were getting married, and a few months after that I was going to be ordained as a pastor. One reason Grandma was having the operation then was so she could attend both of these events.

Dad rang me at the end of the operation to say Grandma wasn't doing well, and I remember praying harder for her than I thought I had ever prayed for anything before. I don't know how long afterwards Dad rang again to say Grandma had died. I didn't doubt God or question my faith at the time, but I really didn't agree with the way He responded to my prayers or the prayers of my family.

A few years later when our third child, Jacob, was born, he started to do this little annoying thing of regularly stopping breathing and turning blue. Thankfully the first times this happened were during the day, so we were able to notice it and shake him awake and he would start breathing again, otherwise he would have been a SIDS baby. A week after he was born he was back in Moree hospital, and when he kept on stopping breathing and ended up far below his birth weight it was decided to fly him to Sydney to try and determine what was going on. So, in the middle of the night Jacob and Karen got on

an air ambulance to Sydney, while I took our other two young children, and my mother who was thankfully up with us at the time, and drove the eight-hour drive to meet them. In those days of everyone not carrying a mobile phone always with them, I remember praying so hard on that whole drive, not having any idea if Jacob was still alive. It was only in the middle of the next morning that we got to meet up with Karen again and find out how he was. Thankfully, Jacob lived, and to see the fit and healthy man he is today you wouldn't guess all the dramas he went through then. That time the prayers of myself and others were answered, when with hope and faith all that we could do was reach out and pray for God's healing.

I am sure many of you can relate to those experiences. Why do we do that? Why do we reach out to God and pray like that when we feel we can do nothing else? There are probably plenty of reasons for that, but I wonder whether at the base of most of them it is because we have faith, no matter how small and tenuous it might feel; faith that we know God loves us and that He will have faith-full compassion for us, even if the outcome isn't what we have asked for.

There are two stories of faith and healing in our Gospel reading for today. They are very intertwined, and while there are some differences between them, they are very similar. Both speak of the faith of people who reach out to Jesus with that kind of prayer for help we have just talked about. Both bow down before Jesus and rely on His faithful compassion to heal them, and He does that for them both.

A woman who has been ill for 12 years comes to Jesus believing that just by touching His cloak she will be healed. She is poor, having spent all of her money on doctors, and her illness makes her unclean so she shouldn't be anywhere near this crowd, let alone deliberately touching someone. But her faith and hope see her push past that and she reaches out to touch Jesus, and she is healed. She doesn't remain anonymous, though, as she had hoped. Instead Jesus has her publicly identify herself so He can speak words of assurance to her: "You are now well because of your faith. May God give you peace! You are healed, and you will no longer be in pain." (v. 34)

Jairus is the leader of the local synagogue; he is like the local pastor. He is elected to this position by his community, but when his daughter is sick he goes to this man, Jesus, who is already an enemy of the Jewish establishment. Jairus doesn't just quietly go to Jesus, but in front of everyone he *kneels* before Him and asks for His help. Another interesting part of this story is that when the woman comes and interrupts Jesus' journey to Jairus' daughter, and then news comes that his daughter has died, not once are we told that Jairus became frustrated, or angry, or even gave up hope. From the way the account is told here, it seems that even when he had heard the news of her death, and when he had got to his house and saw the mourners, he still kept listening to and trusting Jesus' words; "Don't worry. Just have faith!" (v. 36)

Two similar, but different, but similar stories of people reaching out in faith for Jesus' healing. As dramatic as both healings were, the real miracle here is the steadfast faith they both had in Jesus' compassion.

In these stories, the pleas of both people who reached out in faith were answered. For me, sometimes my prayers get answered the way I want, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes I'm happy when I get a different answer, and sometimes I'm not. I thank God, still today, that Jacob came through. In the years after Grandma died it would often sadden me that even though we soon after ended up living near where she had lived we didn't have the opportunity to regularly see her, and she didn't get to see her great grandchildren come along. At the time of Grandma's funeral one of my cousins, who was with Grandma the night before her operation, told me that Grandma had said she was at peace with whatever happened, because if she died she would finally be with Grandad again. For her, that peace, that assurance, that faith, was the miracle she received as the result of her prayers and everyone else's.

In so many ways we live with God's faith-full compassion in our lives. We don't always see it, because it doesn't always come out the way we want it to. But it's there, and we know it's there, because with any amount of faith we have we can find ourselves reaching out to God in prayer in the same way that woman reached out to touch Jesus' clothes, or that Jewish leader risked everything to come and beg Jesus to heal his daughter. When we pray in that way for whatever it is in our lives,

whether it is the big and life-threatening things, or if it's the everyday things of life, we are in faith reaching out to God's compassion. It might be over any situation in our life, something we or our family are going through; conflicts, pressures, stresses, disappointments, hopes. Each time we reach out, God comes to us with those same words of Jesus, words which assure us of His love and care whatever happens; 'Don't worry. Just have faith'.

'Don't worry. Just have faith'. It can sound overly flippant, or even too easy to just have rolling off of our tongue. But the reality sometimes is that when things are going tough for us, in whatever we are struggling with, that is often all we can do. And at those times we don't always see the miraculous ways that God does help us through these situations, either in the way we have asked or sometimes in ways we don't understand. What we can know, we can be sure of, because we both read about and experience it, is that our faith in God is faith in His faith-full compassion. It's a compassion we live in. It's a compassion we are called to share. It's a faith that even the smallest, most hopeful prayer spoken out to God will be heard and answered. In response to our prayers He also says, 'May you have my peace! Don't worry. Just have faith'. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

#### **'Don't worry. Just have faith.'**

Think about any times when you have prayed or reached out to God with that hope filled prayer, when there was nothing else you could do but hand it all over to Him.

- On those occasions, how did it turn out? Was it the way you wanted?
- Even if God didn't answer your prayer in the way you wanted Him to, are you able to still see His love and compassion in how things turned out?
- Sometimes we will still be angry or disappointed with God by how things turn out, and we can't see any wisdom or compassion in what happened. If you have any situations like this, pray about it, and if needed find someone with whom you can talk this through.

#### **Patience, Peace and Faith**

In our Gospel story, both Jairus and the unnamed woman showed patience, peace and faith when they came to Jesus. Both believed He could and would heal them, and Jairus continued to believe in Jesus even when learning of and witnessing his daughter's death.

- Do you always find it easy to show these three virtues when you face hard times in your life (many of us do struggle with this!)? If you do, instead of being hard on yourself, bring these struggles to God and ask Him to help you with this.
- Reflect on the reasons why you have patience, peace and faith with God. How has He shown His love, power and compassion in your life, both in the past and still today?

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