

Trinity 5 - Mark 5:21-end. Two Miracles

Prayer

When were you last caught up in a crowd? And how did you feel about it? You can gain a sense of community being in a crowd, where you get carried away by what everyone else is doing. You don't want to be left out so you join in. Think for instance of the idea of the Mexican wave perhaps at a football, cricket or tennis match. Alternatively a crowd can make you feel lost and alone. Lots of people in a small space, no-one appearing concerned for anyone, merely themselves. It would appear impossible to get through unless you go the way of the crowd. My last experience of a crowd was in St Marks Square in Venice. It was the middle of a very hot June afternoon and the whole world seemed to have disembarked on to San Marco. A huge crocodile line of people were patiently waiting to go into the Basilica. Streams of people were going over the bridges where the street sellers were surrounded with requests for Venetian mementoes. "Let's get out of here" was my reaction.

In this morning's Gospel we are informed that "a great crowd gathered around Jesus" and that "he was by the sea" and again that "a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him." Why had such crowds gathered? What were they hoping to see? Jesus had crossed over the Sea of Galilee following a miracle he had performed, where he had exorcised unclean spirits from a deranged man. The spirits had entered swine, which made them rush down the steep bank and into the sea where they were drowned. All extremely dramatic. Some people were very concerned and begged Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. But the majority followed Jesus excitedly wondering

what this miracle worker would do next. And the crowd was still there on the other side. Word was obviously travelling very quickly. Jesus just couldn't get away from the crowd.

Jairus, one of the leaders of the synagogue, had been one of those who had heard what Jesus had done and was now determined to seek the healer out. Until now he had probably kept a good distance from the prophet and healer. But everything had changed when his daughter had become extremely ill to the extent she was dying. Could this Jesus save his daughter's life? Unashamedly, showing no embarrassment, in view of the whole crowd, Jairus fell at Jesus' feet and boldly begged him repeatedly to "Come and lay your hands on my daughter so that she may be made well, and live." What do you think the crowd thought? It would certainly set some tongues wagging at the next service in the synagogue. Jairus had shown no concern for his reputation or his spiritual vanity. Jesus' thoughts are clear. He is touched with compassion for the father, who has a 12-year old daughter critically ill, so he went with him.

The crowd of course followed him. They weren't going to miss out on this. Then Jesus suddenly stops and asks who touched his clothes. With so many people around, the disciples are amazed by Jesus' question. But Jesus knows that power has gone from him and he turns to look round at the crowd. A woman who had been suffering with haemorrhages for 12 years and who had visited many physicians in the hope of a cure, realising she was now cured simply by touching Jesus' cloak, came forward in fear and trembling to declare it was her. The crowd had been her friend because she had been able to make her way anonymously through the people so as to touch Jesus' cloak, knowing this would be enough to heal her.

Jesus said to her, "Daughter your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease." Was it the power of Jesus which caused the healing or the faith of the woman? Faith is the channel for God's healing. We can all creep up behind Jesus to reach out and touch him when life with all its stress and pressures begins to get us down. Faith is the first sign of renewal and a new life. Touch Christ and be healed.

Now the crowd which came to the aid of the woman ironically greatly challenges Jairus' hopes. People came from the leader's house to inform Jairus that his daughter had died. Jesus turns to Jairus with the words we all must hear, "Do not fear, only believe." Jesus now dispenses with the crowd, allowing no one to follow him but Peter, James and John. Yet when they arrive at the house Jesus is met by another crowd for the grieving process is already in full flight. Professional mourners are there with flute, weeping and wailing allowing others to vent their feelings without restraint or embarrassment. Jesus declares, "Why do you make such a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." They laugh at him, as indeed the crowd has laughed at Jesus' followers from that day to this.

Jesus takes with him into the house where the daughter lies just the child's mother and father and those who were with him. "Little girl, get up!" She does and Jesus asks them to tell no-one what they have seen before very practically telling them to give her something to eat. The miracle of the resurrection of Jairus' daughter takes place in the intimacy of a private room in the presence of a precious few.

So I ask you this morning can the Church's crowd mentality - the mentality of like-minded people - inadvertently act as a block to those who want to find and touch Jesus? Does our church language, customs and ceremonies, our ways of doing things support or distract the hopes of the newcomer to our church? What can we do as a Christian community to avoid blocking the way and helping others to find Jesus today? Indeed how welcoming are we? Do we reach out to those in need? When new members come to this Church, do they experience the sense of a community they wish to join or is their first thought, "Let's get out of here." If we wear the clothes of Jesus, the clothes of prayer, of mercy and forgiveness, of thanksgiving and gratitude, of compassion and generosity and always the clothes of self-giving love, then we shall reach out to everyone, inviting them to join in, to be part of the crowd which follows Jesus, to touch him and be healed. Richard Gillard expresses this well in his servant song:

"Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant too."

Bill Pattinson

30.06.2018