

HEARERS OF THE WORD

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Psalm (29) 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15; Mark 5:21-43

Jesus took her by the hand and said to her, “Little girl, get up!”

Mark 5:21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23 and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” 24 So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. 26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” 29 Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” 31 And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” 32 He looked all around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” 37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 38 When they came to the house of the



leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” 40 And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” 42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The double story style is known as the “sandwich technique” and is fairly typical of Mark’s writing. There is a profound symbolic meaning in the contrast between the mature woman and the young girl. The stories are also found in Matthew 9:18-26 and Lk 8:40-56.

KIND OF WRITING

The story of the young girl frames the story of the woman with the haemorrhage. This framing technique is used

Thought for the day

We may miss the shock factor in both stories today. Given the strict rules surrounding ritual purity, it was unprecedented that a woman with some kind of gynaecological complaint should actually touch a man. Conversely, Jesus touched a corpse, also strictly forbidden and entailing ritual impurity. Both acted courageously and against the established tradition for the sake of something greater.

Prayer

Help us, Lord, to know when to reach out, when to touch and welcome the excluded. Help us to know when to set aside received practices which hinder the Gospel in our day. May this woman’s example gives us courage!

elsewhere in Mark and invites the reader to link the stories. Furthermore, they belong to a series, as noted last week: The Stilling of the Storm (4:35-41); the Gerasene Demoniac (5:1-20) and the Woman with the Haemorrhage (5:25-34) including Jairus’ daughter (5:21-23, 35-43). There is meant to be a progression: authority over nature, evil spirits, sickness and even death itself. As with all the stories in all the Gospels, the faith of the community *after the resurrection* influences the expression of faith in Jesus.

It is notable that both narratives have women as central characters and both underline the need for faith. Apart from the heightening effect of the inserted story, the number twelve links the two tales – the women suffered for twelve years and the little girl was twelve years old. Both are also called daughter. Both are freed to become bearers of life, at a symbolic level: the woman can now have children and the girl is at the age appropriate for marriage in the culture.

There is a tremendous contrast between the turmoil of the crowds in both scenes and the magisterial calm of Jesus. The final teaching of the passage is that the resurrection of *Jesus* brings victory over death and conquers the fear of death, which can paralyse us.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

On the raising of Jairus' daughter see 1 Kings 17:17-24 and 2 Kings 4:18-37. On the story of the woman with the flow of blood see the regulations in Lev 12:1-8; 15:19-30. Fluids to do with reproduction, in the cases of women as well as men, render a person *ritually* impure. Ritually pure people had to avoid such a person and rites of purification were prescribed after childbirth, menstruation and touching a corpse.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

Jesus does perform similar miracles in the Gospel of Mark. E.g. the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-34), the cleansing of a leper (1:40-45) and so forth. There is something close to the raising of the dead in 9:14-29, when the boy *seems to be dead* and the text reads: "But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand" (Mark 9:27-28). The Greek for "lifted" reads literally "raised", the same word used for Jesus' own resurrection from the dead.

ST PAUL

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 21 We are meant to think of the west side of the sea of Galilee.

Verse 22 Falling down before him is elsewhere in Mark – e.g. 3:11. The leader of a synagogue had to oversee the functioning of the house of study and prayer.

Verse 23 Laying on of hands is typical in Mark: 6:5; 7:32; 8:22, 25. In Greek, "made well" is literally "be saved" – an extra layer of meaning.

Verse 24 This is the crowd mentioned at the start and now they have a role.

Verse 25 The second story supervenes: it is usually assumed that the complaint was gynaecological, which would lead to ritual impurity for anyone who touched the patient and for anyone with whom she came into contact.

Verse 26 A rather damning picture of the medical profession!

Verse 27 Touching is the problem here.

Verse 28 This is a rather magical view of the power coming out of Jesus. However imperfect, it brings to expression at the same time an act of faith.

Verse 29 "Immediately" is typical of Mark.

Verse 30 Notice again immediately. Touched my clothes seems odd when we expect touched me, but the question respects the tentativeness of the woman.

Verse 31 The response of the disciples seems reasonable.

Verse 32 The meaning here is one of glaring!

Verse 33 Fear and trembling are the usual reaction to contact with the transcendent.

Verse 34 It is very important that Jesus addresses her as daughter – it raises a kind of *a fortiori* expectation: he can do that much but what about the daughter who is dead? Faith is acknowledged as the key to receiving salvation. Peace is Hebrew contains the idea of physical well-being and so here "go in peace" and "be healed" are really two ways of saying the same thing.

Verse 35 The news serves to increase the suspense.

Verse 36 Cf. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." (Mark 5:34)

Verse 37 This is the "inner cabinet", being the first to be called, the witnesses to the Transfiguration and to the prayer in Gethsemane.

Verse 38 This reaction is a confirmation of the death and is altogether very human.

Verse 39 Sleep is a common metaphor for death. Here it is ironic.

Verse 40 This reaction, very dismissive, serves to present ordinary human scepticism at the idea that there can be victory over death itself.

Verse 41 A very gentle moment. The expression is in Aramaic, the common language of the period. *Talitha* (related to the word lamb) means youth or girl. Cf. our use of "kid" as a term of affection. Cf. Is 40:11.

Verse 42 The immediacy of the cure is

typical of miracle stories. Amazement is ambiguous in Mark because often it is static and "leads" nowhere.

Verse 43 The secrecy is a pattern in Mark. Here it is narratively illogical because there were so many witnesses to the fact that the girl was dead.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Like this woman, have you had the experience of a cure, an improvement, a success, after a long period of nothing happening? What was that like for you? What made the difference? On that occasion was there anything different in you, in others, in the circumstances – something that paved the way for the change or improvement?

2. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. It seems a strange request with crowds milling around. Many people brushed against him but the woman made contact in a different way. The same can happen in our relationships. We brush against many people but make real contact only with a few. Who are the people you have touched, and who has touched you? What difference has this made to you and to them?

3. It can happen that there are many occasions when we brush against Jesus, and other occasions when we have a sense that we are in contact with him. What deepens your contact with Jesus?

4. Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has made you well'. What difference does it make to you that you have faith? In what ways does your faith make you well?

5. When Jairus asked Jesus to come and cure his daughter, some thought there was no point. Sometimes a situation can look like a lost cause. Has it ever happened to you that subsequent events showed there was hope where you thought there was none?

PRAYER

God of the living, in whose image we have been formed with imperishable life as our destiny, dispel from your people the fear of death and awaken within us the faith that saves.

Bid us rise from the death of sin to take our place in the new creation. This prayer we make through your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little

2 Cor 8:7 Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

2 Cor 8:8 I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. 10 And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— 11 now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. 12 For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. 13 I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between 14 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. 15 As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

In chapters 8 and 9, Paul turns to something we all do from time to time: he appeals for funds. However, the appeal is not for himself or even for his mission: it is for the believers in Jerusalem and Judea, suffering from poverty.

The Gentiles had received *spiritually* from the Judean Christian communities. Because the Gentile churches seem to be better off, it would be fitting for them to support their fellow believers *materially*. There was much more to this than the mere practically of financial support. In Paul’s mind, such mutual giving and receiving would be a symbol of communion, cementing the mutual belonging and indebtedness already achieved by Jesus’ death on the cross. Thus, the collection—which he called the *diakonia* or service—would promote the true fellowship of believers from very different backgrounds.

KIND OF WRITING

The passage is a classic of persuasive rhetoric. The omitted first 6 verses form an introduction or *exordium*. V. 7 is the thesis or *propositio*. The verses which follow are various kinds of proofs or *probationes*.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

For these two chapters, the context is wider than the simply the Corinthian community. Central to Paul’s great dream is the breakdown of barriers between Jews and Gentiles. He dreamed up the collection precisely as a means of honouring both Jews and Gentiles. It is, perhaps, a little cheeky of Paul to ask for money, given the fraught relationship with the Corinthians just patched up in chapters 1-7.

RELATED PASSAGES

This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. So, when I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain; and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. (Rom 15:22–29)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 7 The last line is the key one and it is expressed with careful indirectness: he wants them to *excel* (= lit. to abound). It is preceded by a combination of flattery and a reminder of indebtedness. It also contains a little surprise: we might have expected an affirmation of *their* love for him but we get instead *his* love for

them. Undertaking is lit. “grace”, with a double meaning of both favour and gift.

Verse 8 in Vv.1-5, Paul help up the astonishing example of the Macedonians. It could feel like tremendous pressure, but no, he wants them to feel free. At the same time, there’s a competitive air.

Verse 9 Anchoring the case for giving in the life and death of Jesus is, in the context, immensely persuasive. Jesus made himself poor that we all might become rich.

Verses 10-11 Here is the direct appeal: you’ve already begun, so bring it to completion. V. 11 is carefully phrased. In effect, he is calling their bluff—was the previous eagerness genuine or was it “inflated speech”?

Verse 12 Although Paul had praised the Macedonians precisely because they gave beyond their means, here he pulls back. Any gift should be in proportion to what one has.

Verses 13-14 A fair balance is very attractive, of course, but he does notice the present abundance of the Corinthians. Perhaps the rolls may be reversed in a future moment, who knows?

Verse 15 The citation is from Exodus 16:18, the context being the story of the manna. However, Paul has rewritten the Greek so as to create a perfectly balanced bicolon. Thus the form reflects exactly the content. Cf. *But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.* (Exod 16:18)

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. When I am asked to give (whatever it may be), what first comes to mind...reasons for or reasons against?
2. In the Christian project, we are all mutually indebted at different levels. That sense of being able to give and to received is at the heart of the Gospel.

PRAYER

God of all grace, all that we have and are is a gift from you. Help us to be gracious and generous in our turn, so that the measure we give out will be the measure we receive. We make our prayer through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

God did not make death: he created all things so that they might exist

Wis 1:12 *Do not invite death by the error of your life,
or bring on destruction by the works of your hands;*
13 because God did not make death,
and he does not delight in the death of the living.
14 For he created all things so that they might exist;
the generative forces of the world are wholesome,
and there is no destructive poison in them,
and the dominion of Hades is not on earth.
15 For righteousness is immortal.

2:21 *Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray,
for their wickedness blinded them,
and they did not know the secret purposes of God,
nor hoped for the wages of holiness,
nor discerned the prize for blameless souls;*
23 for God created us for incorruption,
and made us in the image of his own eternity,
24 but through the devil's envy death entered the world,
and those who belong to his company experience it.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The reading for today is quite short and, for the sake of clarity, a few verses in italics have been added. It can still surprise people to learn that in the Hebrew Bible there is precious little about any real life after death. Israelites were happy to believe in God “for this life only”, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15. Later, a greater concern for the *justice* of God led to an increased interest in what happens when you die. This can be seen from a number of texts given under Old Testament background below. The Wisdom of Solomon has a strong theology of the soul as eternal, somewhat in contrast to earlier Jewish ideas. It seems to have been under the influence of Platonic philosophy, although still faithful to the Hebrew Bible in terms of the picture of God and the role of the chosen people.

KIND OF WRITING

Although written in excellent Hellenistic Greek, the passage shows that common feature of biblical poetry called parallelism. Technically, the lines are in synonymous parallelism, but, as often, the

second line progresses the thought or is somehow more concrete or definite. Notice that each time, the second line is more explicit and that bit richer.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

The book of Wisdom was written about 30 BC in Alexandria, by a Greek-speaking Jew who was faithful to the faith of the fathers. An outline of the first six chapters may help us to locate and interpret our reading. Our selected excerpts come from the end of the opening *Exhortation to Justice* and from the end of the first *Speech of the Impious*.

RELATED PASSAGES

Daniel 12:1-4; 2 Mac 7:20–23; Wisdom 3:1; 7:27; 8:19; 9:14-15.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 12 At this point, we are at the conclusion of the exhortation to justice or righteousness. In the writer's mind, immorality or injustice brings its own punishment with it. Later, in v.16, he mocks the desire to bring death upon yourself: *But the ungodly by their words and deeds summoned death; considering him a friend,*

they pined away and made a covenant with him, because they are fit to belong to his company. (Wis 1:16)

Verse 13 This is faithful to Genesis, of course, but is also a tremendous affirmation about God. *For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.* (Wis 11:24) *You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.* (Wis 11:26)

Verse 14 Later in the book, Lady Wisdom does penetrate all things and is the source of their goodness (Wis 7:22, 24, 27; 8:1, 5; 9:1, 11).

Verse 15 A single line forms a frame with the opening v.1a. The thought fits perfectly with the preceding verses and anticipates the link between immortality and right living found across the book (1:1; 3:4; 4:1; 15:3).

Verse 23 A positive affirmation of God's intentions at the start of creation. The thought is relatively new in terms of the Hebrew Bible but very much in tune with philosophical currents at the time. It gives them a solid foundation in faith in God who gave and will always give life. The gloss on image is really a deeper interpretation of the what it means to be in the image of God in Genesis 1.

Verse 24 This is the same thought expressed negatively. The reference is to Genesis 3 and the cooperation of Adam with the serpent.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. We are all challenged by the brute fact of death and yet we hope in God. How have you made the discovery of God “who loves humanity” and whose will for us is “life in abundance”?
2. God's relationship with us (= righteousness, in biblical terms) is the real ground for hope beyond the destruction of death. As we seek good, we sow the seeds of our own immortality.

PRAYER

God of love, life in abundance is not only your will from all eternity but also your gift in Jesus, the resurrection and the life. Let us embrace your offer of life by living the vision of the kingdom and so may we become truly his disciples in word and in deed. We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

A. <i>Exhortation to Justice</i>	(1:1-15)
B. Speech of the Impious	(1:16-2:24)
C. Four Diptychs contrasting the impious and the just	(3:1-4:20)
3:1-12 reward v. punishment	
3:13-19 blessed v. dishonour	
4:1-6 virtue v. evil	
4:7-20 rest v. anguish	
B ¹ . Speech of the Impious	(5:1-23)
A ¹ . <i>Exhortation to Wisdom</i>	(6:1-21)

THE LITURGY

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Psalm (29) 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15; Mark 5:21-43

READINGS 1 AND 3

The reading fits very well with the Gospel, which is that of the raising of Jairus' daughter. The passage from Mark is explicitly about death and Jesus' power to raise the dead.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 30 (29 in the liturgical numbering) is a song of thanksgiving. It celebrates God's faithfulness through a crisis which brought the person praying close to death. The poetry shows that the writing works with pairs of words (*binomia*) such as: God's anger/ God's favour; for a moment/ through life; weeping/ joy; night/ morning; mourning/ dancing; sackcloth/clothed with joy; silence/praise.

There are several words for the near-death experience: Sheol, the pit, and death itself. Thus, the Psalm is perfectly well chosen to respond to the reading.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Wisdom 1:13-15, 2:23-24

All of us face the brute fact of death, first of all through people close to us and then we face our own. We have many questions, of course. This reading offers a reflection on death from the point of view of God's intentions.

Second reading

2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

For once, St Paul is looking for money. He knows that the people he is asking are poor, so he has to be careful. His main argument is very powerful and his request is very moderate.

Gospel

Mark 5:21-43

There are two stories today, one "sandwiched" inside another. Both concern women, an older woman and a very young girl. Both are concerned with the spring of life.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 28 June

St Irenaeus, bishop and martyr

Genesis 18:16-23

This very human way of describing God might seem "primitive" but the spirituality behind it is anything but primitive. Abraham intercedes and his intercession is effective in reducing God's intended wrath. Of course we are very uncomfortable with aspects of the story; nevertheless, the daring intimacy of Abraham, effectively calling God back to his merciful self, can still speak to us today. We too can dare to be intimate because we know in Jesus just how loving and merciful is our heavenly father.

Matthew 8:18-22

The conditions of discipleship are daunting and, yet, the stories are unfinished and open-ended....

Tuesday 29 June

Sts Peter and Paul, apostles

Acts 12:1-11

This symbolic tale reminds us that whatever the appearances, God protects his followers.

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

Not really by Paul, this is a good reflection back on life as the apostle. He is shown as an old man, full of faith.

Matthew 16:13-16

Peter did attain a special role in the early Church, initially at Antioch in Syria. This present story is unique to Matthew and often thought to be a post-Easter commissioning account.

Wednesday 30 June

First martyrs of the See of Rome

Genesis 21:5, 8-20

Although Ishmael really was indeed Abraham's son, nevertheless domestic rivalry leads to the shocking expulsion of Hagar and her child. Fortunately, God takes the side of the refugees and, indeed, of Abraham himself.

Matthew 8:23-27

This extraordinary story works on more than one level. In Jewish tradition, pigs

are ritually unclean. The demons ask for permission to reside in them, but it turns out to be only a stay of execution. The victory of Jesus over evil is total.

Thursday 1 July

St Oliver Plunkett, bishop and martyr

Genesis 22:1-19

This deeply disturbing story has troubled readers from earliest times. Originally, it may have meant something like the end of human sacrifice. But now in the book of Genesis, it portrays a terrifying test which is apparently contradictory. It may capture a feeling that fidelity doesn't always lead to blessings...

Matthew 9:1-8

Forgiveness is God's prerogative in the Bible and so the story would have shocked the first hearers. The physical healing illustrates the spiritual healing.

Friday 2 July

Genesis 23:1-4, 19, 24:1-8, 62-67

We have a very human moment on today's reading: Abraham loses his beloved Sarah and Isaac loses his mother. Rebekah—a fateful character in the stories of Isaac and Jacob—enters the narrative.

Matthew 9:9-13

The call of Matthew inspired a very famous painting by Caravaggio. It is dramatic and the subsequent scene is electrifying. The risk will be that we may think of ourselves as the virtuous whereas we are really among the sinners.

Saturday 3 July

St Thomas, apostle

Eph 2:19-22

This short reading is rich in resonance: it presents the Christian life as a home coming (something most of us have experienced), a being built into a house of God.

John 20:24-29

It is interesting that this story survives in popular memory as "doubting Thomas." And yet, the central point is his tremendous faith and confession: my Lord and my God.