

Resurrection Community

Sermon on Mark 5: 21-43

After Jesus' death stories about him were most important to his followers and friends. Commemorating Jesus was in a way as necessary for them as eating and drinking. They knew that Mary and the other women, later some of the men as well, had overcome their fear that would have easily prevented them from speaking about the empty tomb and the risen Lord in the garden.

The bold appearance of some of Jesus' friends in public was the birth of the Jesus movement after Jesus' death. It was, if you like, the hour of the birth of the church: this time when people silenced by shock and fear gain back their voices, stand up for what they believe and share their faith experiences courageously with others.

These friends of Jesus, fighting with their anxiety after his terrible death, are the start of a resurrection community in which people seek and find the way of life, love and justice.

The belief in Jesus' resurrection was most essential for this growing resurrection community in which stories of resurrection played an important role. Talking about Jesus healing withered hands, sick mothers-in-law, blind and lame people, lepers and women with bent over backs and endless bleeding, raising sons and daughters from the deathbed, calling back into life his friend Lazarus, and last but not least rising from death himself, helped the friends of Jesus to overcome their fears and discover strategies to cope in a time of injustice, oppression and death!

Hope for the Kingdom of God, hope for an earth in which only God was king, was the central thought that enabled the friends of Jesus to keep going.

The expectation that God would put an end to suffering and death nourished people's hopes and dreams, and empowered them to live a life of love and dignity – in spite of the darkness of their time...

Death and dying were a cruel and frightening reality for the majority of the people living in the first century. Those who were among the first Christians and had courageously founded the first small church communities experienced daily the dying of children from malnutrition and lack of care. All sorts of diseases, hard physical labour, an appalling lack of hygiene, no water, no waste disposal in those areas of

the villages and towns where the poor people lived, caused a shocking number of far too early deaths.

Women died when they gave birth. Children died at their birth. Toddlers died from preventable diseases, fathers died at their work places, old people died from hunger and neglect.

Death was all around. Death was constantly present.

There were wars, there was violence in everyday life: execution, torture, public persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, inhumanity in the prisons, in the streets and violence all over...

Failing crops and economic injustice led to hunger and impoverishment.

Are we far away from that today? I bet you read the newspapers and watched the news in the past days and weeks? Desperate people in the streets of Haiti and elsewhere protesting and fighting against hunger, against lack of food, and against the increasing prices for food...

In the times of the early church only few people lived to an old age, satisfied and happy with their lives. Most people had to live and deal with death at an early age. Many died when they were still young.

But what kept them going was telling each other stories of people overcoming death. The mother who'd just lost her third baby, the young man suffering from an incurable disease, the grandmother having stood at graves of more children and grandchildren than she can bear... all those and many more told each other the stories of the healing of the woman with bleeding and the restoration of Jairus' daughter's life. They kept reminding each other, how neither the woman with the bleeding, nor Jairus, his wife and his daughter, nor the disciples, nor Jesus accepted death, but instead believed in the nearness of God and his power to make things change.

Thus the miracle stories of the New Testament are stories of resistance... resistance of faith against the powers of violence and death in this world! The miracle stories with their healing and restoring elements were and are an expression of the hope of the early Christians against the slavery and oppression the Roman occupation army was forcing on them.

For these oppressed and impoverished followers of Jesus it was not so important whether the stories they were passing on, had happened exactly the way they were

told. It was much more important what these stories of standing up and becoming whole could do to people.

... how they could change people, give them stuff for their dreams and encourage them to hope and pray;

... how they could help the oppressed and hungry crowds to hold fast to their dignity and the expectation that one day all people would have a fair share of everything...

Telling stories of healing and resurrection is finding a language to name the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection, and expressing the indestructible hope of life for all creation! No matter what the political situation is like...

in the first century just as much as in the 21st!

One of the early Christians stories of hope is the sandwich type story of the daughter of Jairus and the healing of a woman with bleeding.

It introduces to us two people who have not given up hope. There is a father fighting for the life of his daughter. And there is this nameless woman with the most terrible story of 12 years' suffering who still seeks a way out, a way to life in all its fullness.

The people who came to Jesus for healing, believed in his ability to pass on the power of God. They'd heard of him. He was famous for his power, his words, his touch.

He called all the marginalized and sick folk of his time into partnership with him and God, and against despair, destruction and death.

Being healed and becoming a child of God seems to be **one** thing. Being healed opens people's ways back into the community. And this is where the Kingdom of God starts for them.

There is this woman. She'd suffered from this mysterious bleeding for 12 years, and nobody had been able to help her. She'd spent all her money but nothing had changed.

She'd heard so much about Jesus, she'd heard about healing and restoring, about touching and making new.

So she came and hid in the crowd, moved towards Jesus as close as she could and touched his coat. Because that was what she'd hoped and believed: if I can only touch his clothes, I will be healed.

12 years are a long time of suffering.

12 years of trying to hide the illness, of pretending to be healthy.

12 years of living alone.

12 years of isolation.

12 years of loneliness.

12 years of rejection.

12 years of being unclean and a danger to all the others.

12 years without touching and being touched – just because the law wanted it like that.

How cold must this world, the woman had lived in, have been? How dark? How inhuman the rules that put her there!?

The woman had lost everything: money, possessions, friends & family. But one thing she had not lost – and that is somehow amazing enough -: she had not lost the hope for a change. She had not lost her hope for something better...

She'd heard all these stories of healing, and one day she simply took the risk. She left her lonely place and walked out...

If I only touch his clothes, I will be made well...

The miracle that happens before the miracle that comes through touching Jesus' clothes, is the miracle that this poor and outcast soul had not lost her dream of wanting to be healed. It is her certainty and her faith, her power to life with which she helps Jesus to reveal his power!

And Jesus confirms this by saying "daughter, **your** faith has made you well."

Which faith would Jesus confirm today – among those who are standing up for their rights, their health, their food?

And how would the mighty and powerful react?

How would we react?

"Daughter, son, man, woman, mother, people of Haiti, your faith has made you well..."

When Jesus calls the woman daughter – she is given back her place in the community.

Your faith has made you well – means: your courage, your coming, your touching, your talking... has made you well.

What a wonderful way of restoring a person's value and dignity!

Your faith has made you well!

Let us come to the second story in our text:

Jesus and the disciples take the boat to the other side of the lake. Crowds have already gathered to greet and meet him.

And in the middle of it all this man Jairus, a religious leader of the Jews, comes to Jesus. He looks him in the face, falls down on his knees and says: My daughter is dying, can't you come and touch her, heal her, restore her?

Unusual plea of an upper class man to approach a wandering about preacher and healer... But no surprise is reported from Jesus' side.

Jesus is willing to come with Jairus. And while they are already walking towards that part of the town where Jairus lives with his family, the story with the woman happens. Moments... lost? How many minutes did it take her to touch and talk and be blessed? Minutes in which the girl died?

While they still talk, some people from Jairus' house walk towards them with the terrible news that the young girl – 12 years of age – just as old as the suffering of the woman had lasted – that the girl had already passed away.

Too late. It is no good bothering Jesus any longer.

Jairus' family's got to look this death in the eye...

But Jesus does not accept this death. He refuses to believe it.

"Do not fear", he says to Jairus. "Just believe."

Hold fast... keep going... carry on!

And to the people in the house of mourning, he says: "The child is not dead, but sleeping." Which makes them all laugh at him in disbelief.

He takes only the parents and two of his disciples and goes to where the girl lies.

“Get up”, he says to the girl, and she who a moment before didn’t have the energy to live, can now get up – and eat.

The dead don’t eat. She must be alive!

She is alive, because Jesus had refused to accept her death, and asked the parents instead to nourish her.

That is more significant about Jesus than all the miracles together: that he refuses to accept the power of death. That is what impressed people most about him, what they learned from him, and what we can learn from him... when we look at world politics just as much as when we deal with illness in our lives.

...there is power coming out from Jesus.

There is a woman healed.

And the dead girl stands up and eats.

What if we spoke the sentences he spoke?

She is not dead. She is only sleeping.

Would the crowd laugh at us?

Would we be considered crazy?

Would we be able to oppose their “too late, don’t bother Jesus any longer?...and be healed and restored?

Are we allowing Jesus to change us into people who do not accept the power which death has over so many people’s lives?

Are we giving God a chance to work through us?

After Jesus’ death the people who’d lived with him understood that this death was not the end of their hopes for the liberation of Israel, but had brought liberation. They were then free from captivity in terms of being free from the power of the oppressor – through the power of their God. The oppressor hadn’t vanished, but the fear which the Romans had always evoked in the ordinary people had transformed into a consciousness of self worth and dignity among those oppressed.

The memory of Jesus, his words and works, his way of living told the early Christians what was to be done. It freed them from fear and despair and set them in motion.

Where does the memory of Jesus tell us what needs to be done?

The early Christians understood that believing in resurrection means believing that the death of Jesus was not the end of the story of the man from Nazareth, nor was it the end of the hope that people could live another life – a life that is not determined and reduced by the powers of fear, pain and death.

They started telling their stories about Jesus. And ever since the courage to change the world has grown. And the face of the earth is forever changing.

Let us start telling our own stories.

Stories of Jesus.

Stories of not losing hope.

Stories of risking and daring and touching.

Stories of restoring and nourishing.

Stories of being freed and being healed.

Stories against the mighty and in favour of the poor.

Stories against the deaths of this world and in favour of even the smallest of lives on earth.

And let us hold fast to God's great promise of justice, of peace and of life - for all!

Let me finish with a confirmation of faith

about Christ's coming into the world:

**Christ has come to turn the world upside down,
to humble the powerful and to lift up the lowly.**

**Christ has come to turn the tables,
to topple vain idols and to stand with the poor.**

**Christ has come to proclaim God's Kingdom,
to feed the hungry,**

to give sight to the blind,

to strengthen the weary,

to set the prisoners free.

**Christ has come to turn the world upside down,
to overthrow the present order**

with a revolution of love.

Amen.

