

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 – Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

**Mark 5:21-43**

**LOVING COMPASSION**

Have you ever been in the situation where, because of what you or someone you loved was going through, you felt that you would do anything to make things better? Have you ever made a deal with God in that kind of situation, “God, if this turns out ok then I’ll ...”? Thinking about God and turning to God is something which is not uncommon for people to do in times of need and trouble, nor is trying to make a deal with Him. Famously a young law student many years ago was travelling one night through a forest in Germany when a thunderstorm hit. In fear for his life he promised God that if he lived through that storm he would leave law school and become a monk. If Martin Luther hadn’t made, and kept, that promise, who can say how both the Christian Church and the western world would be different today. A number of years ago I visited a church member who was in hospital with heart concerns – when I think about it he would have been younger than I am now, so I can relate more to why he was concerned. As his pastor he was not someone I saw very often on a Sunday, and one of the things he said to me from his hospital bed was, ‘If I get through this, I need to make God a bigger priority in my life and start coming to church more often’. He did get better, thankfully, and human nature being what it is I saw him in church about as much as I did previously. It has been said that if everyone who made a deal with God when they were desperate actually kept it, then there would not be enough churches to house those who come to worship each Sunday.

Have you ever been in the situation where you have believed that you would do anything you could especially to help someone you loved, prayed in desperation, or even made a deal with God for a good outcome? Have you ever got to the point where you would do anything, risk everything, so that someone close to you or even you yourself could be healed?

That’s the situation of the two people we have here in our Gospel reading for today; two people from very different situations who both find themselves in desperate need of healing. The first is a leader of the local Jewish synagogue, Jairus, whose daughter is dying. As the synagogue

leader he is a senior Jewish religious leader, but unlike another senior Jewish leader, Nicodemus, who first comes to Jesus at night so he won't be seen, Jairus comes to Him during the day, and before a large crowd of people he kneels down and asks Jesus to heal his daughter. There is no way the other Jewish leaders would have found that acceptable behaviour, but he didn't care; all he wanted was for his daughter to be healed. That's understandable, isn't it? If you have ever had a child in that situation, you would get that level of desperation. We are not told anything about Jairus beyond this story, but after Jesus brought his daughter back to life it is hard to imagine him remaining as part of a group who were openly persecuting Jesus.

And the second person in this story in which two healing miracles are intertwined, is a woman who has been ill for 12 years. The nature of her illness means that according to Old Testament law she is unclean, so not only has she been physically unwell for so long, but during that time she has been unable to have close contact with friends, family, anybody. In a crowd like this one around Jesus if anybody recognised her or her illness she could be chased away with sticks and stones. But still, she risks that public shame and possible physical pain, why? Because, we are told, 'she had heard about Jesus' (27a). In her faith, she touches Jesus, and she is healed. But she doesn't get away as anonymously as she had hoped, but Jesus calls her out and uses her faith as a teaching point for both those there and also for us.

Two different people both with a desperate need and desire for healing. But there is something else which unites them here; faith. Jesus praises the nameless woman for her faith, saying that it's her hope and trust in Him which has made her well; not what she has done, not what she promises to do if she is cured, but her faith. When Jairus receives news that his daughter has already died, Jesus says to him, 'Don't worry. Just have faith!' and proceeds to go and raise his daughter back to life. It is by faith that they come to know and experience the loving compassion of God which now comes to them in Jesus.

What has your experience been in the times when you have had a desperate need of the loving compassion of God? Maybe you made a deal with God, maybe you didn't, but you prayed earnestly for something to happen, or not happen, and how did that turn out? My guess is that, based on human

experience, sometimes those prayers were answered in the ways that you and others longed for, and sometimes they weren't. I've seen occasions when miracles have occurred and healing has happened; sometimes in ways that can be explained by medical science, and sometimes outside of that, but either way, it is still a miracle. God works through different ways and means. The times when not just in relation to the health of ourselves or others, but in relationships, our financial or work situations, in our faith, in all parts of our lives, through prayer and turning to God in hope and trust either our situation changes or we are better able to face and move through what we are facing. God's loving compassion isn't always about changing things to how we want them to be, sometimes it's about helping us be able to accept and work through how they are. Many times miracles happen to us and around us, the kinds of things that we put down as coincidence, or change of heart, or medical successes, or even our own hard work. If we look at it honestly and openly, we can see the loving compassion of God at work in our lives everyday; it is something we so often take for granted.

But then, what about the other side, how do we deal with that? When we pray, even make promises, for a healing like we read about here in the Bible, and then it doesn't happen? Is God's loving compassion not there for us then? Do we not have enough faith? Are there not enough people praying? Do those things which cause us grief and hardship in our lives happen because God is punishing us, or testing us, or making us stronger? The kinds of answers we will sometimes get from Christians sound like what Job's friends said to Him in the Bible, 'This will just make you stronger'. Why do the bad things still sometimes happen, despite our faith, despite our prayers? We don't always know, but we do know that it's not for any of those reasons. God can and does work through the hard times, but He's not causing them, they are a part of the sinful and fallen world we live in. A world which He came into in Jesus to go through all the things we go through. For some people those times do strengthen their faith, while for others, sadly, they weaken or destroy it. Again, we don't always know the 'why?', but we do know the 'who?' of who is always with us, healing us, and carrying us through these times.

The other side of God's loving compassion is that it is not only what we receive, but also what we are called to share. In this Gospel account we have two people who broke through the barriers

which had been put around them, and we see Jesus praising the faith and sharing the power of His healing with two people outside of His normal group. How do we go with following His example? Are we able to share compassion in God's love, whether it is in a smile, words of encouragement, with our time or talents, or even with money, with those we have a grudge against, who have a different background to us, a different lifestyle to us, even different beliefs and values? How would Jesus have reacted to and treated those people who we are sometimes a bit uncomfortable to be around, let alone help out? We can open ourselves up to letting this be another miracle happening inside of us, so that our love and compassion going out to others is as indiscriminate and selfless as is the way that God's comes to us.

There are so many examples of God's loving compassion being shown to people, both in the Bible and in our lives, and we see such great examples of that here in these two stories which are bound together. And we receive this loving, forgiving, healing, gift of God's love based not on what we have done, or any deals or promises we make, but simply through our faith (itself a gift from God), which is about how open we are to receiving it. And as we receive, we can also now share. Whether your prayers and cries are always answered in the way you want them to be, look for and see how you experience God's love and compassion in your life, knowing that through your faith He is always with you, healing you, forgiving you, strengthening you, guiding you. Amen.

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

- Can you remember a time when you desperately prayed for a situation to turn out in a particular way? Have you ever made a deal with God about this happening?
- In what ways have you/do you experience the loving compassion of God in your life? This could be in big things which have happened, or in blessings and circumstances which are a part of your everyday life. Take the time to stop and reflect on how God is showing His love to you and others in ways you don't always notice or acknowledge?
- Jesus shows us here that He is indiscriminate in sharing His love and compassion with others, but this is something we at times struggle with. How do you go with that? Are there any hurts you find difficult to forgive? Any people or groups you struggle to show compassion to? Pray, asking God to help us to be as open in sharing His love as He is in giving it to us.

Pray: Thank God for all the blessings of His love and compassion we see in our lives. Ask Him to help us to always see His love being with us, and to be able to share it with others also.

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