

**Sermon for Romsey and Lancefield**  
**28th of June 2009**

**Psalm 130**

**2 Corinthians 8:7-15**

**Mark 5:21-43**

Today all of us who are baptised are going to reaffirm our baptism. This definitely doesn't mean we're being rebaptised; baptism only happens once, and whether we were baptised as a baby, a young person or an adult, from that moment we were initiated into the church, fully part of the body of Christ. Baptism is a once-in-a-lifetime event, but it's so important and life-changing, and it demands so much from us, that we need the occasional reminder of it. Today we're going to reaffirm the vows that we or our parents made at our baptism; we're going to say together the Apostle's Creed which unites us with every Christian of every century and every country and every denomination; and we're going to reaffirm our commitment to mission. As I say every time I baptise someone, baptism is our death to violence and oppression and hatred and darkness and death and our rebirth to peace and justice and love and light and life. This rebirth leads us to live in a particular way: as people who gather together to pray and learn and celebrate the Eucharist; as people who proclaim the good news of God; as people who love our neighbours as ourselves; as people who strive for justice and peace. This is what it means to be baptised; it's an incredibly deep and life-changing commitment.

In baptism we become part of the body of Christ. All three of today's Bible readings tell us something about what that means. The Psalm reminds us that God is a God of forgiveness and steadfast love, on whom we can call and in whose word we can hope. This is the God that we worship whenever we gather together. Paul's letter to the Corinthians reminds us that Christians are called to be generous, especially to other Christians. Not, Paul says, that we should be generous to the point that there is relief for others and pressure on us, but definitely that when we have means and others don't, there should be a fair balance between our present abundance and their need. Being part of the body of Christ means sharing, which is why every week we offer to God a proportion of what we have, for the use of others who have less. Finally, today's reading from the Gospel of Mark gives us insight into what the body of Christ, the church of which we become part in baptism, looks like.

Today's gospel story tells of two healings. Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, falls at Jesus' feet and repeatedly begs him to come and lay his hands on Jairus' daughter, who's dying. Jesus goes with Jairus, but on the way a woman who has been suffering from uncontrolled bleeding for twelve years, touches Jesus' cloak and is instantly healed. Jesus, aware that power has left him, asks who touched him. In fear, the woman comes forward and tells him the story. Jesus tells her to go in peace; her faith has made her well. While he's speaking, people come to Jairus to tell him that his daughter has died. But Jesus continues to the house and tells the mourners that the girl is not dead, only asleep. He then takes her by the hand and tells her to rise, and she obeys. And Jesus then orders her parents not to talk about this, and to give her something to eat.

The first person to be healed in this story is a nameless woman. She's been bleeding for twelve years, so it's likely that she has considered herself and been considered by others to have been ritually impure for twelve years. No one has been able to touch her for twelve years. She may once have been rich, but Mark tells us that she has spent all she had on useless doctors. She feels unable to approach Jesus directly, but instead tries to secretly touch his cloak. When she's discovered she's afraid. In the society in which this woman lives, she's an outcast.

The second person to be healed is the daughter of Jairus. Unlike the woman, Jairus has a recognised role in the community. He approaches Jesus openly, although humbly, kneeling and begging Jesus for help. The 'commotion of people' mourning outside his house probably included professional mourners, so Jairus was well off. The woman and Jairus are united in their faith in Jesus, but they're divided by their gender and class. Jairus is an important man. The unnamed woman is a marginalised and unclean woman. The story begins with Jairus' request. If Jesus was sensible, he would hurry to Jairus' house and cure his daughter, a child of privilege. And indeed, Jesus does set off with Jairus. But he's then sidetracked by the need of a low-status woman. Jesus not only cures her of her bleeding, he welcomes her

into his family. Jesus gives priority to the marginalised woman over the privileged man. Jesus is a Messiah who welcomes the marginalised into his family as loved daughters.

I've contrasted the unnamed woman with Jairus, but the story is actually about two *women* who need healing. I seem to spend a lot of sermons talking about the way that Jesus treated women, the way he welcomed them as equals in a patriarchal society. That's not just because it's a bee in my bonnet, although I guess equality between women and men is, it's because equality is a characteristic of the new community that Jesus created, the body of Christ. Jairus' daughter has a family and some wealth, but like the woman she's nameless. And like the haemorrhaging woman, she may be considered impure. Jesus defiles himself by touching her dead body. The haemorrhaging woman has been unable to bear children for twelve years; the twelve-year girl has never borne a child and, if dead, will never be able to. The two women are connected in their need of Jesus and in their marginal status, and Jesus crosses the boundaries between men and women and the pure and impure to touch them and heal them.

Jesus allows the woman to touch him; he welcomes her touch as an indication of her faith. Her touch does not make Jesus unclean; rather Jesus' power makes her well. She is rewarded with health that will continue throughout her life, an invitation to peace and wellbeing that goes beyond physical health, and a place in the family of Jesus as a daughter. Jesus' breaking of boundaries gives an isolated and nameless woman a place in the community. The twelve-year-old girl is also restored to full life. By quoting Jesus' words in Aramaic, '*Talitha cum*', Mark indicates the affection implicit in Jesus' healing of her. This girl is already a daughter, a daughter of the parents who love her and of Israel, and Jesus' healing enables her to reclaim this status.

Mark is telling us the story of two daughters, brought into full life by a man who is not afraid to cross boundaries. The community that Christ created, which became the church in which we all belong through baptism, is a place of welcome and healing, in which men and women and rich and poor are equals, and in which no one is unclean. When we are baptised we become part of this community, welcomed and loved as the daughters and sons of God. And we also become responsible for welcoming others. As part of the body of Christ, it's our job to follow Christ by loving others. When we reaffirm our baptism, we claim again our place in this community and all the responsibility that leads to. We reaffirm our commitment to follow Christ, the one who welcomes and heals. Thanks be to God. Amen.