

**3 after Trinity- Proper 8: 1 July 2018**

**(Wisdom 1: 13 - 15, 2: 23 - 24; 2 Corinthians 8: 7 - end;  
Mark 5: 21 - end )**

May I speak in the name of the living God, who is Father,  
Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

‘God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living’ Solomon writes in our Old Testament reading. And in our Gospel reading Jesus raises a girl from death and cures a woman who is trapped in a living death because she bleeds constantly, and he gives them both the gift of life.

Most of us, probably all of us, have experienced the death of someone we love either recently or at some time in our lives. But beyond that shared experience, what we have felt, what we have endured, is unique to us.

Death affects each of us differently, and each death we experience may feel very different. Sometimes the loss of the person we love is so overwhelming that we cannot imagine how we will ever cope with life without them. But death can also bring us a sense of relief if, for example, the person who has died was elderly and felt ready to die, or was experiencing intense pain and simply wanted the process of dying to be over.

And the process of mourning is different for each of us too. It may be a sense of emptiness or darkness, with a feeling that this will never end. Or it may be a feeling of release from a huge burden, and a waking into new life.

People speak about “getting over” the death of someone close to them, but I feel that is the wrong way to look at it. We do not get over the death of someone we love, as though it were something to be put in the past and

ignored. Instead I think of it as like the way in which the ground around an uprooted tree comes back to life. The rate of growth depends on the time of the year and the age of the tree, but gradually new life will come and the wound created by the tearing up of the tree's roots will be healed. And yet the ground around the tree will be changed. The earth will take a different shape.

So when someone we love dies, our life is changed, and we will never be as we were before their death. But slowly or quickly, life will come back to us again in a new way as we learn to cope with our loss.

Different cultures have different ways of dealing with death. Our own culture nowadays is, for many people with no faith, simply to pretend that death no longer exists, and that we humans are immortal. Benjamin

Franklin said: 'in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except **death and taxes**' and there is a good deal of truth in this. Death is a truth that all of us need to understand, whatever we believe.

But God does not want us to die. Death was not in his original plan, as we know from Genesis, but somehow things went wrong and because humans have been given free will, death was the result. I am certainly not going to try to explain this, but instead I want to explore what today's gospel reading tells us about death, resurrection, eternal life and faith.

As I have already mentioned, we have two miracles here, which have been sandwiched together in a way that is used by Mark elsewhere. And the reason they have been interlinked is to emphasise their connections.

First, they both concern women. Jairus's daughter is described as being twelve years old and that means she

was of marriageable age and therefore a woman rather than a child.

Secondly, both are beyond medical help. Jairus describes his daughter as being 'at the point of death' and the woman has been consulting physicians for twelve years and is getting worse.

Thirdly, they both show Jesus touching individuals who would be regarded as 'ritually unclean' in Jewish law and therefore not to be touched by a rabbi. A woman would be regarded as unclean and in particular the woman with the haemorrhage would certainly not be touched, so Jesus is overturning taboos in touching them.

Finally both emphasise the need for faith.

Together they form the climax to a series of miracle stories moving from the disciples' faithlessness during the storm, to the demoniac's recognition of Jesus's power, to the haemorrhaging woman's faith in possible healing, to

Jairus's faith which is, in effect, faith in the resurrection. In other words there is a progression in the depth and quality of faith shown in these stories.

The act of raising the dead is the climax of this series of miracles, as it is the climax of the Gospel, which in a sense it anticipates though, of course, the cases are different. Jairus's daughter will return to ordinary human life and will die again, but Jesus will be raised to eternal life. It was a standard view in Judaism that only God could raise the dead. It is true that others, notably Elijah, had successfully prayed to God for a person to be brought back to life, but here Jesus does not pray. He simply acts in the person of God himself.

It is also important that these miracles illustrate a progression from belief in the power of Jesus to faith in his person. The haemorrhaging woman clings desperately

to a belief in Jesus's power to heal, but Jesus explains that it is her faith that has made her well.

Jairus shows his faith from the start of the encounter. He is described as a leader of the synagogue, and he falls at Jesus's feet calling on him repeatedly to heal his daughter. When the news of Jairus's daughter is given to him, Jesus says to Jairus: 'Do not fear, only believe.'

Their faith in Jesus matters. And the same is true for us.

We know that Jesus died for all of us, but we are free human beings as God has made us. We must choose.

Eternal life is open to us all, if we have faith.

'Do not fear, only believe'; and that is what Jesus says to us today.

Amen