

Homily for 19th June 2022 Evensong, Year C, Trinity I, Proper 7

Preached at St Michael the Archangel, Smarden

Mark 5:21-end

Sermon

In this morning's gospel reading we heard the story of Jesus travelling across the sea of Galilee in a boat with his disciples and arriving in the non-Jewish country of the Gerasenes, where he is immediately confronted by a severely troubled man who calls himself Legion because his demons are so many. Jesus heals the man and famously casts the demons into a herd of nearby pigs, whereupon the pigs run down into the lake and drown, taking the demons with them.

More concerned with the loss of their income than the healed man's transformation, the local population ask Jesus to leave, and he does so, getting straight back into the boat and travelling back to his homeland on the other side of the lake.

Our gospel reading from Mark this evening picks up the story right after Jesus returns, with a great crowd of people already waiting for him. You really have to read these stories together in context to see just how differently Jesus is treated and perceived in places just a few miles apart. While sailing across the lake, Jesus calms the storm, and the disciples are amazed by his power over wind and waves. On the far shore, he manages one healing and never even gets beyond the beach before the locals send him packing.

But now, back in friendly territory, Jesus experiences the opposite extreme and his ministry is requested from numerous directions at once. A huge crowd wants his attention, or simply to see what amazing things he will do or say next. Among them, one of the synagogue leaders comes to Jesus because his daughter is dying.

But while he responding to *this* request, a woman manages to touch Jesus and is healed of haemorrhages because of her faith.

Despite all the overwhelming needs of everyone around him, Jesus still manages to take the time to identify the woman and to affirm her faith and her healing – a great example of patient ministry while chaos reigns all around him.

I feel this may be one of the most challenging aspects of any caring or medical profession: can you maintain your presence and attention and open-hearted compassion with one person, while many others around you are tugging on your sleeves or pointing out that you should really be doing or seeing someone else, someone who no doubt deserves your attention more.

Jesus seems to move seamlessly from solitude, to intimate encounters with individuals and small groups, and into the midst of demanding crowds, without any apparent inward groaning or outward complaint. He diverts his attention from the important synagogue leader to spend time with an insignificant woman, even to the point that the leader's daughter dies during the delay.

I often wonder if Jesus was aware of how many people he *didn't* heal, how many might have been trying to get his attention but were chased away by his disciples, or for whom the time in the day simply ran out. On the two occasions when someone dies before he can reach them – his friend Lazarus and this little girl, he does at least know that for them, these deaths can be reversed, but what of the others who never quite got his attention? Did Jesus ever feel a sense of guilt, that he could and should have done more?

I suspect it goes with the territory. Anyone with a caring bone in their body will always have to decide who to disappoint on any given day. As Christians we are fortunate to see that even God the Son, when leading and loving by example, faces the exact same human limitations. We can therefore be reassured that we are not called to split ourselves to respond to every need, but to give our entire

loving attention to the one person that God has placed before us, wherever and whenever we happen to be.