

SERMON

The Servant Conquers (Mark 4:35-5:43)

A child, especially a female child - she would be at the bottom of the pecking order; a woman who should not have been out in public dares to touch Jesus; and before this we can read about a man whom no-one really wanted to go near. Verse 1, Chapter 5 of Mark

“They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no-one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No-one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.”

(Mark 5:1-5 NIV)

But more on him later.

Back to the female child, the girl. In the culture of the day, a child was a blessing from God, but more so when the child was male. A child was to carry on the family name – through the male offspring of course. If a husband died without a male offspring having been born, then his brother was expected to take his place and provide a male offspring.

So a male child was important to a Jewish household, but a female child was also educated... for marriage. A child was a blessing but did not have the same rights as they do now and were not treated in the same way as they are now, as little or junior adults with rights. So the fact that Jesus went to heal a child, and a girl at that, was something very different, something unusual, something that was making a statement about acceptability.

Jairus obviously loved his daughter and did not want her to die. Before Jesus got to the house, there was another problem. She had died, verse 35

“While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher any more?”” (Mark 5:35 NIV)

With death there is no hope, with breath still in the body there is still some hope of a cure. But with death came the problem of becoming unclean, becoming even less acceptable.

A riddle was given to the people by the prophet Haggai which went

““This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Ask the priests what the law says: If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?’”
The priests answered, “No.”

Then Haggai said, “If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?” “Yes,” the priests replied, “it becomes defiled.”” (Haggai 2:11-13 NIV)

So touching a dead person made you unclean and that was a problem because it meant that you had to go through ritual ceremonial washing and that you were considered unclean for a period of at times, up to seven days. During this time you could not go out or worship with others.

So the child was not **accepted**

- Firstly because she was a child and
- Secondly because she was now dead.

And so onto the lady that interrupts the journey to the home of Jairus where the girl was. The problem with the woman who touched Jesus was that she was also unclean because she obviously was having some sort of gynaecological problem which led to her being unclean. If her problem was menstrual we read:

““When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening. “Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean.” (Leviticus 15:19-20 NIV)

If it was a gynae problem, then a little further on it says

““When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. Whoever touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.” (Leviticus 15:25-27 NIV)

Those laws were put in place for hygiene reasons and today we do not have to follow that, but in the time of Jesus you did and so, that day, many of those in the crowd were now rendered unclean because she would have touched them in the jostle of the crowd following Jesus, wanting to see what he did and what he said. So when Jesus turns and says

“... "Who touched my clothes?"” (Mark 5:30 NIV)

She must have been mortified. It was not acceptable for her to be there. She would have to admit her problem and the crowd would not be happy that she had rendered them unclean – that was unacceptable. Interestingly though, until they knew, it would not have bothered them. When HIV/AIDS first appeared on the scene people would mix normally but if they found out that one of their workmates was HIV positive, then the person would be ostracised and the workmates, former friends would refuse to work with the person. Even children of an HIV parents were shunned at school!

This kind of thinking is why we read in verse 33

“Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.” (Mark 5:33 NIV)

She was trembling with fear for what might happen to her, but because she was now healed and she knew it, she was prepared to tell the whole story, even though it would not make any difference to the fact that she would have rendered some of the crowd as being unclean – a very important matter for some of them. The lady was an outcast, not one that was use to mixing in society, not one to be **accepted** by those around her.

Then there is the demon-possessed individual, Legion by name, because he was possessed by many demons as he says. We read of the man, often being chained up, abusing himself by cutting himself. He had a mental health problem caused by the possession by the demons. But what does Jesus do? Jesus talks to him; Jesus accepts the human being and deals with the demons within. To others though he was not **accepted**.

All three of the people that we have mentioned this morning

- The girl
- The woman
- The demon-possessed man

were not **accepted** in the society in which they lived. They were in some respects, outcasts and so not fully or in any way accepted.

So what about us – what does this mean for us? I would like to do another survey – to get some on their feet. You realise that I only do this to make sure that you do not go to sleep during the sermon!

- Please stand if your parents went to church and took you to church with them – it may have been that you went to Sunday School while they were in church.
- Please stand if your parents did not go to church, but you did as a child – maybe they sent you to Sunday School.
- Please stand if your parents did not go to church and you did not go to church as a child.

- God accepted us all, whether we have Christian or non-Christian parents.
- God accepted us all, whether we went to church as a child or not.
- God welcomes us all at whatever time of life we become a Christian, we recognise that we need Jesus in our lives.

Sadly though, there are many different ways of not feeling accepted, but in the Christian world this should never happen. Jesus accepted all-comers as long as they were sincere about following him. Last week as Sue and I thought and prayed and meditated about Café Church we both came up with the same verse

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NIV)

It is that word **whoever** for me. There are no limits on that word. I am sad that in my testimony, my life story, that I cannot say that I was into drugs and sex and rock and roll, I just had the rock and roll. Not because I hankered after those things, I did not but because I became a Christian at the age of twelve and have never looked back. But God accepts all and so should we be accepting as well.

We do not have the problems of the prejudice against the girl, against the woman that Jesus had in his day. Not so sure about the demon-possessed man? Or for that matter someone with mental health problems.

Just this week the story of the minister was told who entered his church dressed as a tramp and was unrecognisable to his congregation. Virtually everyone shunned this smelly, dirty tramp. Later in the service he revealed who he really was and there were several red faces around of those who had shunned him earlier when the minister read

“My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here’s a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”
(James 2:1-4 NIV)

We may or may not experience that either.

Or what about the Baptist minister up north who in his congregation there was Dave. Dave was an ex-heavyweight boxer whose career had been brought to an abrupt end, partly due to drink. Dave was six foot tall and nearly as broad with all his muscles. Dave had made a commitment to God, but at times still had a drink problem and came to church sometimes the worst for wear of drink. One day Dave was sitting in church at the back, obviously had been on the bottle and at the end of the sermon, Dave says something in a whisper. Unfortunately or fortunately his whispers are not quiet and so this voice boomed out around the ‘That sermon was f***ing boring and my God ain’t f***ing boring.’ The minister said that he could not fault his theology even if his language was not right.

After the service the minister saw one of his older ladies coming towards him and he thought that this is it, I’m in for it now. The lady stopped in front of him and said, “Is there any way that we help Dave because he is a lovely man when he is sober and even a little drunk he still has some wisdom.”

Maybe we will not have a Dave, but maybe we will. But there are others who feel that they are not worthy, not good enough to come to church, let alone meet Jesus. And where do they get that impression from – sadly from the church, or at least their perception of it.

Jesus, God accepts all, is accepting of all-comers as long as they are sincere – we will come onto a person who was not sincere later in Mark’s gospel. Remember that because Jesus is accepting to all, so should we and this is overtly and covertly, this is with our words and with our behaviour, this is in everything.

Shortly we will celebrating communion, again where we invite all, all those who love Jesus to come and participate with us taking bread and wine because Jesus died for all and went to all when he was on earth – that is the God we follow.

PRAYER