

SERMON FOR JUNE 28 2015

Death was not God's doing, he takes no pleasure in the extinction of the living.

From today's first reading. Indeed, we are created in God's own image, and it is of the nature of God that he does not die. We are meant for imperishable life, and yet we are subject to death, the great inevitability of our existence. It is the great taboo in a world where health and beauty are lauded as the characteristics of true humanity. Death itself, when it happens, is discreetly concealed, euphemised out of existence, denied. Removed from the domestic setting, it usually takes place in hospitals or other institutions, and people no longer carry the accoutrements of laying out in a drawer of the sideboard. The whole thing is dealt with by professionals, and often the Church does not even get a look in. Yet it is a fact of life. We all face it.

The woman with the haemorrhage and the daughter of Jairus still had to face it, even though for the time being they had been rescued from its clutches. It was only after the resurrection that even the closest followers of Jesus got it. This man went through death and was raised from it so that all could share in his new life, so that it could be manifest that *Death was not God's doing*. One of the wonderful things about the Gospel is that it is forever new. When it is solemnly read in church it is listened to as if it is the Lord himself speaking to us. And indeed it is. Through its proclamation we are encountering Christ himself, who always has something new to say to us. This passage from Mark is so many-faceted that we will all see something new in it. The truth of the resurrection, yes, but also another revelation of who this man really is.

Last week we heard how Jesus calmed the storm and revealed himself as God here among us. Here, in his power over disease and death he shows that he is God in action, bringing release to those in their grip. First century Judaism was firm in its belief that only God could raise the dead, and so when that happened it was God himself at work. When Jairus came to Jesus he already had an inkling of this man's true nature. He fell at his feet, literally *worshipped* him and pleaded for his daughter, who was at the point of death. Jesus goes with Jairus but there is a

diversion by the woman with the haemorrhage. You can read all sorts of things into this. Did Jesus delay out of bias to someone on the edge of society, someone untouchable, rather than rush to the daughter of a rich and influential man? Did he delay so that there was a greater likelihood that the little girl was dead by the time he got there? The woman with haemorrhage was desperate: she clung to the robe of a rabbi in the steadfast belief that he had the power to heal her. Immediately she was healed and Jesus applauded her for her faith. She was an outcast, as was anyone suffering from an issue of blood. Unlike healthy women who were only cut off from society for a week or so a month, she had been outcast for twelve years. We easily neutralise the Gospel by failing to acknowledge the will of Jesus to embrace those who were excluded by the prejudices and taboos of his own society: Samaritans, tax collectors, lepers, persons with various deformities and sicknesses that rendered them 'unclean' – and women. And he himself a respected member of the religious establishment. Perhaps the Church is beginning to wake up to this, though often the secular world seems to lead it by the nose on certain matters.

Before Jesus arrives at the house of Jairus the girl is dead and the process of mourning has already begun: *Why put the Master to any further trouble?* Jesus persists and goes to the house and when he announces that the girl is not dead but asleep he is ridiculed. He takes with him Peter, James and John and the girl's parents, takes her by the hand and says *Talitha, Koum*. She rises, walks about and is given something to eat. So here again God himself is at work. But Jesus is also neutralising another taboo – that is the defilement caused by touching a dead body. Not only that, but breaking another strand of the Law by touching a woman. She was twelve years old and therefore of marriageable age. They were dangerous things for a rabbi to do, especially in the presence of another representative of the establishment. But she was dead. Later events proclaimed that Christ was the vanquisher of death, the resurrection and the life, the living One. He himself was not immune from death, for he shared it with us in the most painful way. His promise is that as he has passed through death, so will we, into eternal life.

Our faith is feeble; how we can imagine anything beyond what we experience here? For Christ to restore the girl to life, for him to raise Lazarus, is to bring the reality of resurrection into the world of the present, to 'earth' it in a sense. But in the end our willingness to trust him rests on faith – our ability to bet our lives on the One who came to us in this way to show us what God is really like. This side of death we will never 'know'. But we can believe and trust, recognising the signs of God's generosity and commitment. How else has the Church survived? How else but through sacramental signs which effectively connect us to the loving heart of God, could this community have survived for over two thousand years? The same Christ, who healed the woman with the haemorrhage, who raised the daughter of Jairus, is here among us now. His body and blood feed us.

All is well. Can you believe this?