

Salvation, illness and death

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[0 : 00] The reading today is Luke 8, verse 40, and it can be found on page 1043 in the Church Bible. Now, when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.

And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about 12 years of age, and she was dying.

As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. And there was a woman who had a discharge of blood for 12 years. And though she spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone.

She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, Who was it that touched me?

When all denied it, Peter said, Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you. But Jesus said, Someone touch me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.

[1 : 16] And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling and falling down before him, declaring in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed.

And he said to her, Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the teacher anymore.

But Jesus, on hearing this, answered him, Do not fear, only believe, and she will be well. And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child.

And all were weeping and mourning for her. But he said, Do not weep, for she is not dead, but sleeping. And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.

But taking her by the hand, he called, saying, Child, arise. And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given to her to eat, and her parents were amazed.

[2 : 34] But he charged them to tell no one what had happened. Helen, thanks very much indeed for reading. Why don't I pray for us as we look at Luke chapter 8 together.

We're at the end of a series. We've been looking at Luke chapter 7 and 8 over these last few weeks, the beginning of the new year. And this is the last one. Let me pray for us. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this great privilege that we have this morning, the great freedom and privilege that we have to hear your word being read and proclaimed. And we pray, please, that you would revive our souls, that you would make us wise, that we might rejoice, that our eyes might be enlightened.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, my aim this morning is that we might, all of us, be convinced that Jesus Christ will usher in a whole new creation at the end of history.

[3 : 58] A new creation where there will be no illness or suffering or hardship or death. A few things, it seems to me, can be more important, and especially in a culture such as ours, where the issues of serious illness and death are so often swept under the carpet.

After all, what does our culture say in the face of death? Well, so often, very little. Like the comedian Paul Daniels, who died two years ago, and from the very day he was diagnosed with a brain tumour, he only discussed it with his wife once.

Of course, there are those who face death bravely. Witness Tessa Jow, the former MP for Dulwich and West Norwood, who in the House of Lords last month explained that she had an aggressive form of cancer, which would most likely kill her in the coming months.

But of course, what we really need in the face of serious illness and death is certainty and confidence.

Certainty about whether there is life beyond the grave. Certainty about how to have life beyond the grave. I guess it's something Maisie will need as she goes through life.

[5 : 21] It's something we all need. Not wishful thinking. Not simply hoping for the best. But genuine certainty.

And that is why this passage we're looking at this morning in Luke's Gospel is so important, I think. Notice, I wonder if you noticed, as the passage was read for us, it very much takes the form of a kind of sandwich. So notice how Jairus, with his ill daughter, is first of all introduced to us in verses 40 to 42.

That's one part of the bread, if you like. And then the focus shifts to the woman with her bleeding in verses 43 to 48. That's the kind of middle bit of the sandwich.

And then back to Jairus at the end with his daughter in verses 49 to 56. Again, the bread on the other side of the sandwich. And I guess by sandwiching this in this way, Luke is making the point that they are linked.

Yes, two miracles. And we're going to look at each one in turn. But nonetheless, the two miracles are linked. And together, they form a far, far bigger picture.

[6 : 28] So, you'll find there's an outline on back of the service sheets. I think for those who are here in Eagles, you've got your own special outline. So do stick with that one.

That's probably the easier one to follow. First of all, salvation from sickness. Have a look again at verses 42 to 44. As Jesus went, the people pressed around him.

And there was a woman who had a discharge of blood for 12 years. And though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment.

And immediately, her discharge of blood ceased. One of the big hitting films last year, 2017, was Manchester by the Sea. I don't know if you saw it, starring Ben, Casey Affleck as Lee, a withdrawn, angry man who ends up becoming the guardian for his teenage nephew.

And Peter Bradshaw, writing in the Guardian newspaper, described it as a film about life as it is lived in the real world. With unassuageable pain and loose ends untied.

[7 : 40] In other words, not life in the kind of social media world where life is always brilliant, but life in the real world. Just as this woman is living life in the real world.

She has this terrible condition. Most likely, I think, what we would call a uterine hemorrhage. But do ask the medics here afterwards.

Her life literally draining away. Away. For 12 years, we're told. For 12 years, presumably, which her whole life has been on hold. And imagine what you were doing 12 years ago.

It's a long time, isn't it? That some of us still in Nappets. A long time ago. She spent all her money on doctors with no joy. Unlike Mark in his gospel, who says the doctors that she made things worse. Dr. Luke doesn't do that. He is loyal to his profession. She is exhausted. She is ritually unclean. So she's cut off from her community.

[8 : 42] Cut off from her family. Imagine not being allowed to mix normally with people. Either your family or at church. And so it's no wonder, is it? That she doesn't come up to Jesus openly.

But instead, secretly. And yet, wonderfully, she's come in faith. And she's come to the right person. And so Luke tells us, immediately she is healed.

And immediately she feels it in herself. That she's been healed. So why does Jesus then stop and draw her out into the open?

Presumably that was the very last thing that she wanted. Verse 46. Jesus said, someone touched me. For I perceive that power has gone out from me.

And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling. And falling down before him, declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed.

[9 : 42] Now, it may be there was some kind of element of superstition in her faith. We're not told. But even if it's not superstitious faith, as she touches the edge of Jesus' clothing, it is certainly timid

faith.

And so what Jesus is doing, he is moving her from timid faith to confident faith. Because that's what faith means. Faith means confidence.

It means certainty. And it's only ever as good as the thing you put your faith in. In other words, you can have someone over here and they can have big faith that a chair with just two legs is going to hold them.

But of course, the fact is, however big their faith is, a chair with two legs is not going to hold them. And you can have another person over here and they have hardly any faith at all, just very small faith.

But a chair with four legs, when they take a look at it, is not going to hold them. But of course, you and I know that actually a chair with four legs is going to hold them, regardless of how much faith they have in the chair.

[10:55] And that is why Jesus draws this woman out of the crowd to give her a promise which she can be confident of and which she can stand on.

Notice Jesus declares her publicly clean so that she will be welcomed back into her community. So it's a great act of compassion on Jesus' part. But he also wants to give her this wonderful promise of verse 48.

He said to her, Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Because imagine from over what would have happened if she had simply touched Jesus' garments and then disappeared off into the crowd, as no doubt at that point she wanted to do.

Perhaps she'd ever be thinking to herself, well, the bleeding has stopped, but for how long? After a week, well, this week's been okay, but what's going to happen next week? And that actually would have gone home to her husband and she'd have said, look, I've been healed, and he'd have said, how many times have we heard that before?

And every day would be a day of uncertainty. In fact, the promise of verse 48 is full of significance, not only for the woman, but actually in the whole of Luke's gospel.

[12:11] Will you turn back to Luke chapter 1, verse 76, page 1032. And some of us will remember when we looked at this passage, Zechariah's prophecy, some time ago, Luke chapter 1, verse 76.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.

What lies at the heart? We've seen this time and time again in Luke's gospel. What lies at the heart of the salvation that Jesus brings? It is the forgiveness of sins.

Then verse 78, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The peace the Bible talks about is not being at peace with myself, peace with God. As someone who is forgiven our sins, because Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

[13:27] It means we can be at peace with God, no longer his enemies. And that is all then encapsulated, you see, as Jesus says to this woman, daughter, your faith has made you well.

Go in peace. But that promise is also full of confidence in the whole of this little section we're looking at in Luke 7 and 8.

Because do you remember the other woman in this section? In Luke chapter 7, verses 36 to 50. The woman who loves Jesus much, because she's been forgiven much.

And do you remember what Jesus says to her in verse 50? Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. And now what does Jesus say to this woman whose bleeding has stopped?

He says the same thing. Your faith has made you well. It's actually the same word in the original, in the Greek. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. You see, it's as if Luke is making a connection.

[14:27] He's making, it's as if he's making the point that what happened to these two women are in some aspects, at different sides of the same thing.

The salvation that Jesus brings. Because the only reason there is sickness in the world is because of our sin, our rebellion against God. Not, of course, that you can link one person's illness and sickness with their particular sin.

But generally, that is the reason for illness and sickness and suffering in our world. It is because of sin and our rebellion against God. Just as last week we said, didn't we, that the reason we live in a disordered world, a disordered creation, is because of sin.

Just as when we come to Jairus' daughter, the reason there is death in the world is because of sin. And just as you may go to a doctor and you may say to your doctor, Doctor, I have these symptoms, please can you help me?

And the doctor says to you, well look, I'm glad you've come. I can see the symptoms. But actually you need to know that behind the symptoms there is an underlying condition that needs to be treated.

[15 : 38] Well, in the same way Jesus comes, he's the savior who deals with the symptoms, sickness, disease, a disordered creation and death itself.

He deals with the symptoms because he deals with the underlying condition, the root cause, our sin and rebellion against God. You see, the point is not just that Jesus could heal on this one day this woman's sickness.

Rather, as with all the other healing miracles in Luke, they point to the day in the new creation when Jesus will rid the world of all sickness and all disease and illness.

Now, in our garden, if you've been to our house over the last few weeks, you'll know that we have some daffodils. And they always come out early.

We bought them several years ago in Wales. They are tough and hardy. And they always come out before the English ones. And they're a great joy at this time of year when it's gloomy and dark and wet and so on.

[16 : 49] Because you see, they make a very powerful statement. They are there in our garden. But they're not just there as a kind of little clump of daffodils. They are there to proclaim the fact that they are the beginning of something far, far greater.

That actually, if you look forward to the spring, just a few weeks' time, there's going to be a whole garden full of color and new life. Just as this one healing points forward to a whole new creation where there will be no more illness and suffering and disease.

Salvation from sickness. Secondly, salvation from death. Because meanwhile, a tragedy has been unfolding in the household of Jairus, the synagogue ruler.

Perhaps earlier in the day, he'd been at home with his wife and ill daughter as she was getting weaker and weaker. She's 12 years old. So if she had been at Grace Church, she had been in eagles. He had heard that Jesus was coming.

He rushed out of his house, perhaps. Perhaps he can't quite believe that on this day of all days, when his daughter is so ill, on this day of all days, Jesus is just down the road.

[18 : 07] In verse 41, he falls at Jesus' feet. Verse 42, the emotions are running high. We're reminded that she is his only daughter. And yet, wonderfully, Jesus agrees to go to him.

And suddenly, where there was no hope, suddenly there is hope. And all along, of course, as Jesus has been dealing with this woman, Jairus has been waiting.

No doubt barely able to contain his anxiety, his frustration. Why is Jesus spending so much time with this stupid woman, his fear? Is it going to be too late? And it is.

It's been a terribly costly delay. Verse 49. While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, Your daughter is dead.

Do not trouble the teacher anymore. Notice, will you, that just as Jesus could have allowed the woman simply to touch him and to be healed and to walk away unnoticed, but he doesn't.

[19 : 13] So he could have healed Jairus' daughter at a distance, just as back at the beginning of chapter 7, he healed the centurion's servant at a distance.

But he doesn't. Because Jesus won't simply save her from dying, he will save her from death itself. Verse 50. But Jesus, on hearing this, answered him, Do not fear, only believe, and she will be well. Literally, she will be saved. Luke draws our attention to the fact that the girl really was dead. That's obvious, isn't it? When they get back to the house, verse 52, people are weeping and mourning.

In fact, it's so obvious that she is dead, that when Jesus says, Do not weep, for she is not dead, but sleeping, they laugh at him. Because they know a dead body when they see one.

I don't know if you've seen a dead body. The first time I saw a dead body is my grandmother's. And, well, I'm not really sure what I was expecting, really. But I walked into the room where she was, and my immediate thought was, She's gone.

[20 : 27] You know, her body was there, but it was so obvious that she had gone. She was so obviously dead. And yet Jesus says, verse 50, Do not fear, only believe.

Which could equally well be translated, only have faith. By which Jesus doesn't mean be strong, find faith in yourself, believe in yourself.

That's, of course, what our world says. You know, have faith in yourself, and you can achieve anything. Well, that is a crushing thing, isn't it, to be told in the face of death. And it only reinforces how little we can do.

It's why our society has no answers in the face of death. So Jesus is saying, Put your confidence, your faith in me, in him.

And then verse 54. Taking her by the hand, he called, saying, Child, arise. And her spirit returned, and she got up at once, and he directed that something should be given to her to eat.

[21 : 39] Notice, will you, that Jesus can raise the dead as easily as, no doubt, Jairus or Mrs. Jairus would have woken their daughter up every morning to go to school.

Child, arise. It's time to get up. And her spirit, I guess her soul, perhaps as we might say, which had left her body at death, now returns.

And she gets up at once, and unlike a friend of mine, who at the moment is convalescing in hospital for a number of days, unlike him, she gets up immediately. And she is fully, physically restored.

Death completely overcome. Now, we could stop there, and we could simply be amazed at the power and authority of Jesus.

And we could put together this week's sermon and last week's sermon, and we could put together the calming of the storm and the driving out of demons that we looked at last week. And we could put that together with a woman who is healed this week, and Jairus' daughter who is brought back from the dead.

[22 : 50] And we could say to ourselves, who can do this but God alone? And we'd remember that Luke is writing to give us certainty and confidence about Jesus, and we'd go away rejoicing that Jesus really is God in the flesh.

But remember, there's more than that. Because the miracles in Luke's gospel don't just point to who Jesus is. They point to what he's come to do.

That he is announcing the arrival of a whole new era, just like the daffodils in our back garden.

Announcing the arrival of spring, something far greater. God's saying, way back in the Old Testament, there's going to be a few years later.

It's a future day when all the dead will be raised, either to everlasting life or the judgment. It's the promise of the general resurrection.

And so what Jesus is saying is that that era which Daniel looked forward to is now beginning.

[24 : 26] Jesus himself will be raised from the dead. Unlike Jairus' daughter, who one day would die again, Jesus went through death never to die again.

He is now Lord. He will return at the end of history as Lord and Judge. On that day, the dead will be raised. Some to everlasting life in the new creation.

Others to the judgment. It brings us back, doesn't it, to the issue we started with right at the beginning. What do we say in the face of death?

In the first century, the tombs of pagan Romans, on the whole, reflected only despair and fatalism.

The Roman poet Catullus caught the mood of many in first century Rome when he wrote this.

The sun may set and rise again. When once our brief light has set, one unbroken night remains.

[25 : 30] That is pretty bleak, isn't it? One unbroken night remains. In glorious contrast, if you go to the catacombs in Rome, I guess some of us have done, then you can read some wonderful inscriptions on the tombs of Christians.

Here rests in the sleep of peace. Mala received into the presence of God. Alexander is not dead but lives. Asselus sleeps in Christ.

Because, you see, they knew what had happened to Jairus' daughter. They knew what had happened to Jesus himself.

That is the salvation Jesus brings. Yes, the forgiveness of sins. Yes, peace with God. But, ultimately, the salvation that Jesus brings is resurrection salvation.

Resurrection with Christ in the new creation. And notice, will you, that as Luke records this, everything that Jesus does, it's all done in public.

[26 : 47] It's all done out in the open. I think if I was Luke, if I was making all this stuff up, I wouldn't have mentioned any place names. For fear that someone might actually go there and start asking some awkward questions.

I certainly wouldn't mention the names of real people for just the same reason. You know, as if Luke is saying, go and check it out. Go and ask them what happened. Those who were there on the day. Well, to those of us who are trusting in Jesus, Luke writes to give us certainty in the face of death. To strengthen our faith in Jesus.

For some, perhaps for many, I hope, that is a great cause of rejoicing. I guess for others, it will be a cause of uncertainty. Perhaps you're thinking to yourself, I do trust in Jesus.

But actually, I long for my faith to be strengthened. I wish it was bigger, so to speak. Well, the way to do that is not by looking inwards, which is so often, I think, what we think the answer is.

[27 : 55] Nor by waiting for some weird spiritual experience. But rather by looking at the facts. Go back to the facts of history. Read through Luke's Gospel.

Have your faith strengthened. That is how faith grows. Of course, it may be that we're here this morning and we don't have this certainty at all. And yet you long for it.

And the wonderful thing is that this certainty and confidence in the face of death, it need not be a pipe dream. After all, what does Jesus say to the woman? Your faith has made you well.

What does he say to Jairus? Do not fear, only believe. And if you haven't yet put your trust in Jesus, if you haven't yet believed in Jesus.

In other words, if you don't have that confidence in the face of death, then I'd love you to come and chat to me afterwards and we can talk more about that. But for now, why don't we have a few moments of reflection and then I shall lead us in prayer.

[29 : 04] I'm going to read from Revelation chapter 21. The vision the Apostle John has of the new creation. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people.

And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore.

For the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new.

[30 : 15] Heavenly Father, we praise you very much indeed for this future day, this new creation, when everything will be made new. A day when sickness and suffering will be banished.

When death itself will be banished. Thank you for this foretaste of the new creation that we have here in the middle of Luke's gospel. We praise you that Jesus himself rose from the dead never to die again.

That he will usher in this glorious new creation. And we pray, Heavenly Father, please would you keep us confident in the face of suffering and hardship.

confident ultimately in the face of death as those who are looking forward to that future day. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.