

Sermon Notes on 'Active Faith' Matthew 9 verses 18 - 26

On the face of it, the man and the woman in today's reading seem to be very different. He was a leader in the synagogue, well known and respected. People listened to him. They asked his advice and he would answer. He was educated. He knew the Law and taught people about God. He taught their history when they met together and worshiped, telling how God had been faithful time and again. She was a woman, and she was unwell. She had been bleeding for 12 years. She was poor, having spent her money on doctors who couldn't make her better. Her illness meant she wasn't allowed to join her friends and family in worship. She wasn't allowed to go to parties, hug her friends or even sit on the same chair as them.

The man and the woman lived very different lives. But on the day, they both met Jesus, they had a lot in common. The man, respected leader of the synagogue that he was, was in a state of shock. His daughter had died. People were arriving at his house to mourn and to share in the family's sadness. He didn't want to accept, wouldn't accept that his daughter was dead. The woman, still ill, was struggling. She was tired and in pain. She was lonely. Was this really how she would spend the rest of her life?

There was another man in town; Jesus. His name was becoming known for the miracles he was doing – water turned into wine, lepers healed, blind people able to see, a paralysed man able to walk again. Most people had heard of him by now. The man and the woman certainly had, and they believed he could solve their problems. They both had faith. The man, being a respected member of the community, walked straight up to Jesus. He looked him in the eye and spoke; "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." The woman, downtrodden as she was, crept up behind Jesus. If only she could just touch his clothes, she knew that she would be healed. So that's what she did, creeping through the crowds until she was close enough to reach out and touch the cloak of the miracle man. Jesus responded to them both. There was no judgement to the woman, who had broken the rules by her actions. No, he called her "daughter" and said "your faith has healed you."

And when the man asked him to go to his daughter, Jesus got up and followed him home. He took the girl's hand and led her from the house, very much alive. To both the man and the woman, Jesus acted with kindness and compassion. He answered the prayer spoken by the man, and he answered the prayer held in the woman's heart. The man's daughter was raised to life. His grief was wiped away in that moment as

he could celebrate the return of his girl to him. What a story to tell at the synagogue! God had shown his faithfulness yet again, through the actions of the man who called himself Jesus. The woman's bleeding stopped. She was able to mix with her friends, return to her family and take full part in the community again. She could return to the synagogue. Perhaps she even worshiped with the man, both of them giving thanks to God for the miracles he performed.

But let's imagine, briefly, an alternative version of this story. What if the man hadn't gone to Jesus when he found his daughter had died? What if he'd stayed at home to mourn? What if the woman had stayed at the edge of the crowd? What if she had been too nervous to approach Jesus? If the man had stayed at home his daughter would have stayed dead. If the woman had kept her distance, she would have stayed unwell. Because faith has to be more than just believing God exists. Faith is more even than believing that Jesus died and rose again. It's not just about belief, although believing matters. But our faith has to be active. It has to change the choices we make, the way we answer God when he calls. It has to change how we view our future, the things we accept, even though they are hard to accept, and the things we act to change. Faith needs us to be active for it to have an impact on our lives and on others.

It's been said that FAITH stands for "Forsaking All, I Trust Him." The man risked ridicule, as he asked Jesus to heal his daughter. The people at his house laughed when he returned with Jesus. The woman risked being pushed even further out of the community. Yet they both felt the risk worth taking. You see, it was the actions that the man and the woman took on that day that made the difference. Yes, Jesus performed the miracles, but only after they both chose to take a step of faith. It was a risky step, but it was a step that changed everything.

So, I wonder... Is there something God is asking of you that you've been saying "no" to? Is there something you need to ask God that you've been too nervous to ask? Do you need to take a step of faith? What difference could that make for you? It might be hard. It might be scary. It may cost you greatly. But, as both the man and woman prove, it will be worth the risk.