

HOMILY PREACHED AT SJH TRINITY 5 WEEK 13 YEAR B 1 JULY 2018

We've just heard about Jesus healing a woman's haemorrhage and bringing a girl back to life. There are several miracles in this part of S. Mark's gospel, demonstrating Jesus' power in various areas. If we hadn't celebrated the birth of S. John the Baptist last Sunday, we'd have read about Jesus stilling a storm: power over the forces of nature. Today's miracles show his power over illness and death. But there is more to them than that.

Being touched by a woman with a menstrual discharge, and taking the hand of a dead person, would have made Jesus unclean according to the Jewish law. This point is not made in the reading, though questions of observing the law crop up elsewhere in the gospel: keeping the Sabbath, ritual washings, and what the law says about divorce, for example. Jesus is not a revolutionary, demanding overthrow of the law, as anarchists in our own day might. But he appeals to something more important than law: the exercise of love. He disregards ritual cleanliness regulations to demonstrate God's restoring love for the woman and the girl. Earlier in the gospel he has touched a leper and healed on the sabbath. No wonder that he chooses as the two great commandments love of God and love of neighbour. The law, with its commandments and customs, is not the yardstick of right and wrong for Jesus, and by implication it should not be for his followers.

We may wonder how this speaks to our own situation. We probably accept with our minds that being a Christian is not about following a set of rules: it's about sharing the risen life of Christ, knowing we are forgiven by his death for us, and joining others to be the body of Christ, his presence on earth. Nevertheless, we are part of a society which tends to have firm opinions of what is right and wrong, and often, in effect, labels people as clean or unclean. The church must prepare to be touched by those whom society rejects: the homeless, the vulnerable, those who are different in some way. Rather than the church 'doing things' for such people, these people actually form the church. The woman who touched Jesus was brought back into society; Jairus' daughter was restored to her family. Her experience pointed it its way to Jesus' own death and resurrection, the source of salvation for all.

Something I notice about Horninglow, and I know the same is true about many parishes, is that there is a great deal of affection for the church. To use a modern term, the community 'owns' the church. "This is our church," people say, and they come to us for baptisms, marriages and funerals, even if they have little to do with the church at other times. This is something positive, and we need to build on it. The problem is there is an unwritten 'law' (and I'm using that term deliberately) that

you have to be a certain kind of person to go to church. This 'law' defines who is in and who is out, just as the Jewish law could be used to define who was clean and who was unclean. But the church is for all sorts of people. In today's gospel there was a respected member of the community – Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue – and a sick woman who'd run out of money. If people won't come to us, we must go to them, to be with Jesus amongst the crowd. The way we are outside our church building will have a greater effect in bringing God's love to those who need it than what we do in church. Inside we celebrate the good news, the gospel: outside we live it!