

It's Not Too Late!

Thomas Robinson, *Learning at Jesus' Side*, 6, July 1, 2012

Matthew 9:18-26

¹⁸ While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "**My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.**"

¹⁹ And **Jesus rose and followed** him, with his disciples.

²⁰ And behold, a **woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years** came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, "*If I only touch his garment, I will be made well* (saved)."

²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "*Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well* (saved you)." And from that hour the woman was made well (saved).

²³ And when **Jesus came to the ruler's house** and saw the **flute players** and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, "*Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.*"

And **they laughed at him.**

²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and **took her by the hand, and the girl arose.**

²⁶ And the **report of this went through all that district.**

Numbers 5:2

² "*Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge [of blood or other fluid] and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead.*"

Job 14:4

⁴ "*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one can.*"

Matthew 6:30

³⁰ *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

Matthew 8:2-3

² And behold, a **leper** came to him and knelt before him, saying, "*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.*" ³ And **Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him**, saying, "*I will; be clean.*" And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Matthew 8:24-26

²⁴ And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵ And they went and woke him, saying, "*Save us, Lord; we are perishing.*" ²⁶ And he said to them, "*Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?*" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

Matthew 16:24-25

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" ²⁵ *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*"

Romans 4:18

¹⁸ **In hope** he [Abraham] **believed against hope**, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "*So shall your offspring be.*"

Brief and To the Point

Matthew is nearing the end of the series of 10 deeds of Jesus that follow Jesus' authoritative teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and help us see what being a disciple of Jesus means. Discipleship is not first a set of tasks or a path of wisdom; it is commitment to a person, Jesus. Who he is defines the challenges, power, and possibilities of discipleship.

Here Mt recounts a remarkable sequence in which two events are interwoven and each helps us see the point of the other. Mt believes in "less is more." He wants us to see the "more."

Both are physical miracles about physical restoration. But both are also signs/pointers to the whole meaning of Jesus' work – physical, emotional, spiritual, social, historic.

The first is about a girl dying before she can enter womanhood. She is given life, raised from death by Jesus' hand: "she will live," "the girl arose." Sign: Who can secure life, even beyond death?

The second is about an older woman incurably suffering both physically and religiously, "saved" by Jesus from perpetual suffering/exclusion. "Save" points to both physical and spiritual renewal.

An element alien to our culture is the idea of impurity, uncleanness – not physical but religious. Purity was defined by the law and became a language of inclusion and exclusion, how the people of God were defined. Many reformers wanted to create a pure community on all levels. Tax collectors and sinners were impure but also lepers, the dead, anyone who was bleeding.

The Faith of the Hopeless

Sometimes we are so used to Jesus' power to heal, his authority over anything in creation, that we can miss what Mt wants us to see: two people in hopeless, impossible situations who come to Jesus expressing expectations beyond all reason. The woman after 12 years has found no healing. The ruler's daughter is dead, the end. It's clearly too late for both of them.

But somehow Jesus' presence brings forth that hope against hope that is at the heart of God's salvation of his broken, sinful, suffering creation. God started the whole story of Israel by promising children to a barren couple, Abraham & Sarah, far beyond the age of childbearing.

Like Abraham, the woman has no rational hope. 12 years! Her disability not only causes ill health but keeps her in a perpetual state of ritual impurity – no temple worship, synagogue, Passover, etc. Her touch is impure. But somehow Jesus is different: "If I only touch..." The ruler's daughter is dead. But he kneels before Jesus in confidence, "...she will live."

It is clearly Jesus' power/authority that heals and gives life. But Jesus calls attention to the faith that brought them to him on such reckless, impossible missions: "Take heart, daughter, your faith has saved you." Like the centurion (8:10), they see in Jesus an authority that is beyond any that they have ever known. An authority for which truly nothing is impossible.

But It's Too Late for Me

We are people of "little faith" (6:30, 8:26). Our imagination is shaped by our own failures and we often cannot / will not see beyond our self-imposed limits. It's too late for me to live trusting God in the basics of life (6:30). It's too late to heal this sin, broken relationship, addiction, rage, grudge, envy, greed, sexual transgression, pride, despair, etc. – this bleeding, this power of death in me. Jesus says, "She's not dead; she's sleeping." We know better. We laugh.

But with Jesus, it is never too late. He approaches a dead/impure corpse – our deepest sin, enslavement, anguish. He makes the corpse into a sleeping girl ready to rise to new life.

Can we imagine it? Can we come to such life-giving love and power? Can we imagine Jesus?