

Reflection: June 30, 2024 Rev'd Ian Brown

2 Samuel 1: 1, 17 – 27, & Mark 5: 21 – 43

“a sad end and healing new beginnings”

Lament is the mournful cry of tragic loss. We have English traditions of suffering in silence that aren't healthy. They only serve to support perpetrators and bullies. More and more now we see public expressions of grief, in solidarity with victims, like after very public attacks on women. How do we deal with our troubles? Leaving flowers at a site is just a beginning. David cries a song of lament for Saul and Jonathan. Then Jairus cries for help for his sick daughter, and we hear of a haemorrhaging woman who is bolder than words in seeking help. Should we leave all of this alone, 'time will heal', or is there something in this mess that's helpful for us, now?

Today's episode of David's story has an important transition. King Saul and his three sons, including Jonathan, David's much loved friend, are killed. David had been anointed long before and now he needs to unite the people and deal with their grief. He calls Israel together to lament.

History remembers Saul as a warrior. He had no formal training, was rash at times, head strong and prone to a few mood swings. We know there had been tensions in the land. David could easily have celebrated over Saul's demise, but he doesn't. David could have been critical of his predecessor. There is much material there and we would understand it, but he doesn't bury the former king the way our leaders like to bury their predecessors.

The writers of the story are aware of loss and sadness at this ending, but with the benefit of hindsight they see it's not the worst thing that could happen. There are the seeds of new beginning in the ending. But David first has to deal with the present reality.

David calls a split, grieving and war torn people to lament. He orders a new song to be taught and he unites his people in their mourning. Pain, trouble, loss and endings must be marked. We

all face these things and David calls the people to face them together – to sing and lament, mourn and remember, together. It's a healthy way to deal with loss and to heal both grief and division. The song is intense with sorrow, perhaps especially over Jonathan. Human pain is recognised and dealt with in a healthy way. David could have gloated at the turn of events going his way. He could have lashed out in anger or with a knee jerk reaction in pain like we see increasingly happening with angry blokes with guns. But David doesn't lash out. His recognition of pain is public and his method is a movement towards healing, even though there has been no reconciliation with Saul in life.

So, like the people of David's day, we will sing at the end of the reflection and perhaps remember those we have lost or those facing loss now, here or in places like Ukraine and Gaza.

But in the gospel, we find Jesus concerned with lament and healing too. David does things that will help people to come to healing, to deal with their grief and go on. In the stories throughout the gospel, Jesus somehow **is** that healing!

Jesus was having a hectic time of it. As we read through these chapters in Mark, Jesus always seems to be crossing to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He was trying to get away from the crowds, but the boat trip was probably the only peace he got! The crowds follow, there are sick and troubled people where ever Jesus goes and they all want help! The late Henri Nouwen, a Catholic teacher, priest and writer, said in the prime of his career, that he became frustrated by the many interruptions to his work. He was teaching at University. He had a heavy agenda each day and didn't like to be disturbed. Then one day, he said, it dawned on him that the interruptions were in fact just as much his work.

When Jesus arrives at the “other side” yet again, a great crowd gathered - this crowd had seen and heard things, the stories about Jesus were getting around. He helped people, he taught well, he accepted every one. And they came and interrupted him.

In the centre of this story of healing Jairus's daughter, another story happens - a woman merely touches Jesus and she is healed. Jesus embodies healing – he doesn't just do things that help people to find healing. There is mystery and spirit and faith at work in the presence and person of Jesus.

The details of this story raise big questions. The haemorrhaging woman's story is sandwiched in the story of Jairus's daughter. The 12 year old girl dies as the woman who has suffered for 12 years is healed; is there some balance system at work here? Is it that there is a scarcity of resources for healing, for wholeness of life? Or perhaps the stories say the opposite?

The Jesus we meet here says to the unknown woman who touches him, "Daughter, your faith has made you well." Jesus begins with relationship. 'Daughter', he says – not who are you?, or how dare you?, but "daughter" – a term of close family relationship. And then he affirms her faith and the story turns back to Jairus, the family and their grief. 'Not really dead' he says, denying the wailers, he goes in with the parents and takes the girl by the hand and says to her, 'little girl, get up'. And she does. Two unnamed women have healing contact with Jesus and their lives are restored to wholeness. Are we dealing with a God who has a divine ledger system? No. But with Jesus there is an abundance of resource for healing and wholeness and life. With Jesus, these cries for help are answered.

Even in Jesus day, not all the sick were healed, so that's not the central point and it looks strange to our modern eyes. Healing is not the metaphor it once was. But the reality of wholeness, the welcome and inclusion of outcasts and the chance of a new beginning that stand behind these gospel stories is just as profound and just as needed today.

Aren't there still those who are haemorrhaging? Aren't there still outcasts, poor and desperate people who need help? Think of the Rohingya, Sudan, Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, think of domestic violence and the violence and drug abuse in disadvantaged communities. In our country and across our troubled world there is

haemorrhaging, there is need of gentle intervention, of an exercise of faith; that healing and wholeness are possible.

The beauty and purpose of this text is in what it celebrates. It celebrates the human yearning for renewed hope, for new life as the outcome of the cries for help of the desperate. And then it bears witness that incredibly good things happen in connection with Jesus. It affirms that the endings of death are not the endings of life and hope and faith.

Crowds of people in the story were amazed! Why were they amazed? They had heard of Jesus, they knew what he did and taught. I think they were amazed because the everyday balance of life and common expectation were shown to be bankrupt! They were amazed to see hope reborn out of brokenness. Amazed, but this is the gospel! This is the nature of good news. This is the pattern of Jesus way; surprising new hope and unexpected life and faith. What Jesus does is not just good leadership, dealing with difficult issues like David does – it's a new order of things altogether.

Perhaps we might think about where the helping touch of Jesus is needed around us, lament with the grieving, listen to the cries of the desperate and then take Jesus words to heart just a little more, "Do not fear, only believe" there is renewed relationship, new beginnings, healing and hope restored. Amen.