

In our epistle reading from the beginning of Paul's letter to the Colossians, he is giving thanks for their faith. But in our gospel reading, we have some equally remarkable examples of faith.

Jairus is a man of faith, who has come to Jesus to worship, even though his daughter has just died. Jairus is convinced that if Jesus were just to lay his hand upon her, she would live. I don't know whether I have that much faith, but perhaps knowing Christ as he walked on earth made things easier for him. I think of the risen Christ's words to Thomas: blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe. I can believe that Christ is raised from the dead, but what of the power of Christ to raise somebody from the dead? That somehow seems harder, even though it is not. And it would be dishonest for me to claim that it is easy for me to believe it, when it is not. In my mind, I know that God can raise people to life, but whether that belief is in my heart, I can't say.

What a tragedy it is for Jairus and his family. I can't begin to feel the pain that parents will feel for the death of a child. She was his only daughter, a girl of twelve years, dying – in fact dead by the time he arrived with Jesus. It's too painful to think how it might have been for them. But mainly this morning I want to focus on the woman who was bleeding. She had been bleeding for twelve years: the same length of time as Jairus' daughter had been alive. She had spent all her money on doctors. Luke, a doctor himself, tells us that nobody had been able to heal her. Mark, who was not a doctor, mentions the fact that Luke omits, which is that under the treatment of these doctors, she did not get any better but in fact grew worse.

But she too had faith in Jesus: in fact, she had faith which said "if I just manage to touch the edge of his cloak, I will be made well". And under the cover of a large crowd, she

managed to get close to Jesus and do precisely that. This simple act, in some ways, was a mix of good news and bad news. The good news was that she was healed: immediately she could feel that her faith had been justified: she was well again. The bad news was that she had not quite “got away with it”. Jesus immediately asked, “Who touched me?” because he had felt power go out from him. Of course the disciples didn’t yet know this, and they said “there are people pressing you from every side and you’re asking who touched you”. But he pressed the point and everyone denied it, and then eventually they found the woman. She would have had a combination of fear and jubilation, I would guess.

What did Jesus say? “Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole.”

Her faith, of course, had not by itself been the cause of her cure. Christ's power had been that. But her faith was the condition on her part. Hence it might be represented as having "made her whole." We should observe that hers was not a passive faith, but it led to action. A passive faith is a dead faith.

Her faith called her to action. Even though she had faith, she needed to do what she felt called to do. I’m reminded of the words of James: faith without works is dead: faith has no power to make alive unless it has power over the life.

Now, I am not at all saying that our salvation depends on anything but faith in Christ, but what I am saying is that action or works should be an inevitable consequence of a living faith.

I’m not always given to quote the former Bishop of London, Graham Leonard, but I remember being quite

struck by his description of the contrast between the supernatural gospel and the secular world.

Quite often people will say there is nothing I can do but still I'll pray. This is in fact a deeply secular point of view. In fact, the correct approach is to say that first of all, I will do the most important thing, which is to pray, and then to ask: is there anything else I can do?

If we do this, then we have the opportunity to respond in faith to whatever the situation may be, and perhaps to be an answer to our own prayer, or indeed to be the answer to someone else's prayer, perhaps by something supernatural or perhaps by something that is a skill or a gift that you have that may not seem to you to be a spiritual gift at all.

For example, I can read the manuals written by computer or printer manufacturers and make at least some sense of what they say, even though most people really can't make either heads or tails of them. I don't view this as a spiritual gift, but on at least one occasion I was able to further the kingdom of God and to be an answer to prayer by being willing to offer help in this area. It wasn't until later that it became apparent that I had been an answer to the prayer of some people who needed to do something with their printer that wasn't straightforward.

And if I wanted to find a scripture to illustrate this incident, I could go for "do you understand what you are reading? – how can I understand it unless someone explains it to me?"

Yet each one of us has gifts that can be an answer to prayer for other people. We need to be willing to be active in our faith and to do the things we can do. Often, we don't have to be the best person for a particular task, but

sometimes to be available and willing at some time and place. I don't need the best carpenter in the world to fix up a piece of wood that needs something doing to it.

But our faith does mean that we need to do something ourselves. It might be going out and looking for a carpenter. Or if it's not a carpenter, we might have to continue in our faith and prayer until the right person is found for a piece of work.

So what am I urging here? Of course, I am urging all of us to put our trust and their our in our Lord Jesus Christ, but I am also encouraging us to put our faith to work by prayer and by seeing what actions we can take and what a difference we can make.

We can make a difference, though the people of the world might not see it. Our view of the world is different from their view.

At the end of our Gospel reading we read that the musicians for the funeral were raising the roof with their music when Jesus asked them to make room and then said that the girl was not dead, but just sleeping. And they laughed him to scorn.

Yet with God's help, we can do these things that have in times past caused us to be laughed to scorn, and which still cause us to be laughed to scorn. As Christian people, we can, by action and with God's help, abolish slavery, improve unfair conditions for prisoners, offer scriptures in our own languages: so many large and small things, caused in major part by the faith and actions of ordinary people like us.

And that takes us back to the epistle reading: That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being

fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God: that is that we will be able to live as the Lord wants and will always do what pleases him and that our lives will produce all kinds of good deeds.

And so, may God continue to bless us as we live our faithful and active lives!