

As we got to the end of that gospel, I was left wondering why Jesus had told them not to let anyone know about what had happened. Jesus had a reputation as a healer, and people had begun to follow him, even crossing the lake to make sure that they didn't miss anything he might do. In today's gospel he has just got out of the boat after crossing over the lake from the other side where he had been teaching them. You'll recall from a couple of weeks ago how he had taught them in parables about the kingdom of God.

The two incidents in today's interrupt Jesus' plans to teach the crowd. He is interrupted first of all by a synagogue official whose daughter is gravely ill. His gesture of falling at the feet of Jesus tells us how desperate he is. It wasn't just a matter of coming up to Jesus and asking him to heal his daughter. He pleads for Jesus' help. Jesus immediately sets out to go to his house and visit the daughter. But as we heard, they are interrupted on that journey by a woman who touches the cloak of Jesus. There is a strange encounter between Jesus and the woman, as Jesus turns quickly and asks who touched him. This leads to the woman falling at the feet of Jesus. It is the same gesture as the synagogue official, but it is a bit different because she has already been healed. This is a gesture of worship. She recognises Jesus as a miracle worker. Perhaps she also recognises him as the Son of God, because Jesus praises her for her faith.

As the story continues, when news arrives that the synagogue official's daughter has died, it seems to be presumed that Jesus would not bother continuing on the journey to the house. But Jesus insists on going, and when he arrives, he sends people out of the house while he takes the mother and father and three of his disciples inside with him. There he tells the little girl to get up, and she does.

It is what happens next that seems a bit strange. Jesus tells them not to let anyone know about what has happened. This is strange because if someone who was known to be dead was now seen walking around, it is hard to keep it a secret. So, what is going on? It is common in Mark's Gospel for Jesus to tell the disciples not to let anyone know what has happened. I think it is because Jesus doesn't want people to get a false idea of who he is. The problem is that they might see the miracle, but not see the true identity of Jesus. The miracle is only a sign of something else. When he addresses both the woman and the synagogue official in this gospel,

he either praises their faith or calls them to have faith. So, the healing is an occasion for faith. But that raises a more difficult question. What is faith?

The faith on display in our two characters today is a faith that not only recognises Jesus as a healer, but also seems to recognise him as God. That is why they fall on their knees. This is a gesture of worship. But it is also a gesture of prayer. To recognise Jesus as God is to recognise him as the God of compassion who hears the cry of the poor and needy. There is something very personal about the encounter of Jesus with both of these people. He changes all his plans to respond to their dire situation.

There is something else. The healings Jesus performs also form part of his teaching about the kingdom of God. Healing is a sign of the kingdom, a sign that God desires healing and wholeness not just for individuals but for the world. This, I think, is why Jesus wants to keep the healings a secret. He doesn't want people to see him as just a miracle worker like some others at the time – even if his miracles were extraordinary. He wants them to see beyond the miracle, and to see God at work in the world – healing the world, bringing wholeness, ushering in reconciliation, and establishing a true community of people in relationship with God. This is the kingdom of God.

The gospel today is a reading about healing; it is a reading about prayer; and it is a reading about faith. I think it encourages us to be people of prayer, and to pray for healing. And to do this with faith. This means that the real intent of our prayer is that God's kingdom may be visible in the world. This is what we pray in the Our Father: "thy kingdom come". We don't always know how God's kingdom will come, and we may feel that our prayers have not been heard. But God does hear them, and whatever the outcome, we are drawn in faith into the unfolding of the kingdom of God. So, like the synagogue official, let's take the next steps in faith.