

Surprise, surprise

28 6 15

O God, the protector of all who trust in you
without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy:
increase and multiply upon us your mercy;
that with you as our ruler and guide
we may so pass through things temporal
that we lose not our hold on things eternal.

Two texts today from our gospel passage of the day:

'Who touched me ?' (5 v31)

'The child is not dead but sleeping.' (5 v39)

Last week, Jesus' disciples were astonished, when Jesus stilled the storm at sea. This week, we hear him surprise them again when, moving through a crowd, Jesus asks who touched him and then arriving at the house of Jairus, a ruler of a synagogue, Jesus tells the people who are there to mourn the girl's untimely death that she is simply sleeping.

Jesus is back on shore. He's been met by Jairus, a ruler of a synagogue whose daughter is seriously ill – on the point of dying. Jairus asks Jesus to come and cure his daughter. Jesus does what he's asked. He's on his way, moving through a crowd, when a woman, who according to legend we know as St Veronica, touches him. She is ill. She is suffering from a haemorrhage, a continual flow of menstrual blood that makes her permanently unclean. No doctor can help her.

She believes that if she can only touch this miracle-working Rabbi, then she will be healed. She does and she is. But Jesus knows that the healing power has flowed from him and so he stops and wants to know who has touched him. Now to the disciples' ears, what Jesus has just said is simply silly since in such a close press of bodies, many must have touched Jesus. But when Jesus says 'touched' he doesn't mean 'touched' but 'touched' i.e. someone has deliberately connected with him to receive the gift of healing. Blushing, shame-faced, because for a ritually unclean woman to touch a rabbi would have rendered him unclean, Veronica owns up. But Jesus does not tell her off but rewards her faith by confirming what she feels in herself – cured, clean, no more blood.

The second surprise is at Jairus's house. Jesus knows that the girl is dead before he could get there – stopping to talk to St Veronica has not helped him arrive in time. But still Jesus tells the mourners that the girl is not dead as they think but is simply asleep. Now the mourners know the girl is dead. If she were still alive, they wouldn't be here to weep and wail over the girl's death would they? But death for Jesus is not death but sleep for he has the power to recall the dead to life. I'm sure, as Christians, we all hope and trust in the ultimate resurrection of the dead but in the gospels, there are three healings when the dead are recalled to life: Jairus's daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus. So putting the mourners out of the house, Jesus goes into the room where the dead girl is lying, takes her by the hand and speaks to her in their native Aramaic 'Talitha cum – little girl get up' and she does – alive and well and ready to eat whatever food her mum has to hand.

In the past two weeks, therefore, we've seen Jesus astonish his disciples by calming the storm at sea; surprising his disciples by knowing he'd been touched in a crowd; and surprising the mourners bewailing the fact of a little girl's death by the assertion that she was only sleeping and that he could wake her up. So the message to us is clear and simple: that Jesus can surprise us and challenge the way we understand things.

And, of course, the question that I must leave you to reflect on is: 'How might Jesus challenge or surprise us today?'

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 32 : Surprise, surprise

