

Everyone has a story.

When a number of us visited the Wayside Chapel recently,  
our guide and speaker for the day, was Rob.

And his story was that he had been living a good life in the suburbs  
with his wife and children; working in a senior security job.

But a separation from his wife meant that he left the family home  
and started living and sleeping in his car.

Which he managed for a while, but it eventually lead to unemployment.

Which lead to being increasingly desperate.

Which lead to dealing drugs.

Which lead to living on the streets.

His life was a real mess before he turned things around  
with the help of those from the Wayside Chapel.

Everyone has a story.

If we asked the unnamed woman in this gospel reading  
about her story – she would have said it wasn't a pretty one.

It centred around bleeding.

Not just a monthly bleed, but a constant one.

And pain.

And doctors and doctor's bills.

Then more doctors and more doctor's bills.

And yet no improvement.

Pain and bleeding – which in such a culture  
meant being considered unclean,

which meant being separated from community events,

which meant friends gradually falling away,

leaving you isolated, and full of shame.

For 12 long years.

Little wonder she didn't want to make a fuss

when she thought to "steal a healing" from Jesus;

to touch him with the trust that that was all she needed  
to stop the wretched bleeding.

Little wonder she wanted to stay anonymous.

It was bad enough to be on the receiving end of all those looks;  
to be the one people steered their children away from.

But if she could just touch his clothes – that would be enough.

So she reached out her hand and touched Jesus.

And it was enough.

She felt the healing immediately.

The only problem was, he did too.

He felt the power go from him.  
He knew there was a touch beyond the jostling of the crowd –  
he recognised the touch of faith.  
And so he stopped and asked who it was.  
She had already started to slink away into the crowd,  
having received what she needed.  
But on hearing his words she swallowed hard and owned up.  
She fell on her knees and told him the whole story.  
She'd become so accustomed to being  
blamed, shunned and yelled at she expected the same from him.  
And that is why his words came like a cool drink on a hot day,  
*“Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace...”*  
Daughter.  
Someone cherished.  
Daughter of Israel.  
Daughter of God!  
And this affirmation from the Teacher  
not only boosted her own self concept;  
but changed how others saw her too.  
Yes, she had been healed of her disease,  
but she had also been made whole in a more complete way.  
She'd been blessed with Christ's deep peace,  
and she'd been restored to her community.  
Such is the way of the Kingdom of God.

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Jairus had a story too.  
In contrast to the unnamed woman,  
Jairus was an important person in the community.  
As the leader of the synagogue he had a role,  
and out on the streets he wasn't shunned, he was welcomed.  
But like the woman, he was now in a desperate place.  
His daughter was ill and she was fading before his eyes.  
He knew he needed a miracle  
and he knew Jesus was providing them.  
So, with little regard for his reputation,  
he fell at Jesus' feet and begged him repeatedly  
to come and lay his hands on her that she might be healed.  
And Jesus agreed.

Jairus was rushing, pushing his way through the crowd;  
constantly turning around to ensure Jesus was still following.  
And so we could imagine Jairus' impatience with Jesus  
when he stopped to have a conversation with a “nobody” –  
that's what Jairus usually called them to himself.  
After all, every moment was a moment his daughter didn't have.  
And as the story of the woman's faith was revealed –

as stirring as it was – Jairus could only shift anxiously  
from one foot to the other,  
not daring to suggest to Jesus to get a move on.  
What’s more, he was concerned this nobody  
may have used up all Jesus’ healing power,  
and there may have been none left for his daughter.  
It was the way people thought in those days.

And then the others came, hardly daring to meet Jairus’ eyes,  
with the news that he didn’t want to hear –  
that his daughter had died.  
And Jairus couldn’t help but hate that woman  
who had kept Jesus from his daughter.  
And he didn’t feel that great about Jesus either,  
letting himself be distracted by a woman with no name.  
All hope was lost.  
All the rushing now seemed absurd;  
all the hurrying, now irrelevant,  
as he allowed the news to seep into his soul  
that his daughter was dead.

...But then these words whispered into his ear by Jesus.  
*“Do not fear, only believe.”*  
And Jesus gestured to keep moving.  
*“Only believe.”*  
Wasn’t that the word the woman had used  
in explaining herself to Jesus?  
That she had *believed* he could make her well with just a touch?  
And now Jairus seemed bound to this woman  
in a way he didn’t quite understand.  
And his steps quickened once more.  
Believe. Believe what?  
That Jesus had some knowledge that the girl hadn’t really died?  
That if she had died, Jesus could do something about it?  
He wasn’t sure, but his feet kept going  
and somehow he was again filled with hope.

And so arriving at the home, Jesus takes Jairus and his wife,  
and the 3 closest disciples, and goes to the girl.  
He speaks to her.  
He lifts her by the hand.  
And she rises and walks around.  
And a little more of the Kingdom has come to fruition  
in the lives of needy people.

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These stories seem to suggest that faith

isn't having all our doctrine sorted out;  
it isn't living a sterile life of obeying commandments.  
Faith here seems to be lots of different things.  
It's white-knuckle desperation  
and throwing caution to the wind.  
It's falling on our knees to beg for help  
and maintaining trust in the face of bad news.  
It's sometimes a quiet personal quest  
and at other times it's openly calling out for help  
Sometimes it's reaching out to touch Jesus  
and at others it's allowing ourselves  
to be raised by Jesus to new life.  
Faith is lots of different things  
but they are all centred on the person of Jesus.

Everyone has a story.  
I wonder what is your story?  
I wonder where it connects with Jesus?  
We may not always receive the "happily ever after" ending  
yet these stories still speak to us  
about the nature of faith,  
the compassion of Christ  
and the shape of the kingdom God is still forging today.