

## Good News of a Good Savior

### St. Matthew 9:18-26

<sup>18</sup> While he was saying these things to them, behold a certain ruler came kneeling before him and said, “My daughter is now about to die. But come, lay your hand upon her, and she will have life.”  
<sup>19</sup> So Jesus rose up and followed him, together with his disciples. <sup>20</sup> And behold, a woman suffering for twelve years from a chronic flow of blood came up behind him and took hold of the edge of his garment. <sup>21</sup> For she was saying to herself, “If only I touch his garment, I will be saved.” <sup>22</sup> But Jesus turned and saw her, and said, “Take courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you.” And the woman was saved from that very hour. <sup>23</sup> Then Jesus came to the house of the ruler and saw the flautists and the crowd in commotion, <sup>24</sup> and he said, “Go away, for the girl has not died but is sleeping.” And they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup> But when the crowd had been taken out, he came in and grasped her hand, and the girl rose up. <sup>26</sup> And the news of this went out through that whole region.

In the Name of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### 1. Introduction.

It is a genuine pleasure to be with you all this evening here at Trinity Anglican Church: I bring greetings from churches the world over: from Indianapolis, from San Diego, from Los Angeles, and from Buenos Aires. And it brings me joy to bring, not just greetings, but that Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ which is proclaimed all over the world, just as it is here. I am honored tonight to open God’s Word with you all and declare once again “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

The Apostle Paul calls that Good News, the Gospel, “the power of God unto salvation for all who believe” (Romans 1:16). In our Epistle Lesson this evening (Colossians 1:3-8), Paul explains that it is not so much the preacher who goes out changing lives as it is the Gospel itself: it bears fruit before the eyes of unbelievers who desperately need to know God’s love and be reconciled to him through his Son.

But even for those of us who have been followers of the Lord Jesus for a long time, sometimes we begin to think that this news might in fact be *too good* to be true. I have to admit that, in the rough times and painful moments, I can begin to lose hope that God’s promises to save us because of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection are true.

But this is where our Gospel lesson from Matthew leaps in to bolster our faith and confidence in Christ and his Good News. Matthew has crafted an account of two miracles that Jesus performed for two women, with his point being to show that ***Christ is the one, and the only one, who gives life.*** He not only brought life to these two women, but he can and will do exactly that for you if you come to him.

And to bolster your belief, trust, and rest in these promises, Matthew stresses two aspects of Jesus’ character which reassure our hearts that his promises to save us and to give us life are “a sure and steadfast anchor for the soul.”

## 2. An Absolute Compassion.

The first aspect of Jesus' character which Matthew brings to the fore is his absolute compassion for these women and for us. This can seem so obvious, and yet it is one of the first things that we tend to doubt about our Lord.

To give you an example, about four years ago, I was struggling with a powerful anxiety about my future. I was worrying about a career I had not yet attained, about schooling I had not yet started, and about a family I had not yet produced. My anxiety (as I realized through sitting down and talking with a pastor) about these things came from a deep suspicion that God, in fact, did not have my best interests at heart, did not love me enough to save me from the consequences of bad or foolish decisions, did not and would not have compassion on me. So, instead of trusting in the promises of God to be my loving heavenly Father, I grabbed back the responsibility of making my life successful, with the accompanying anxiety that came along with that foolish burden. I would like to say that I am alone in struggling with this, but I regularly run into Christians who often find it difficult to believe that God is compassionate and full of good will toward them in Christ.

But Matthew purposefully and marvelously shows Jesus' absolute compassion here in our passage. Jesus exudes compassion to these women not just in what he does, but in how he does it.

First, Jesus heals the woman with the chronic hemorrhaging out of pure compassion. Notice, this woman was a perpetual outcast in Jewish society: her unceasing menstrual flow made her ritually impure, unable to worship God and untouchable by those who desired to worship God. In fact, she does not even address Jesus: she believes that he has the capacity to heal her, but she cannot comprehend that the Lord would actually desire to heal her.

But Jesus does three things. First, **he turns**. He stops what he is doing and focuses on her, giving this woman priority over the dying daughter of a powerful synagogue leader. Second, **he looks at her**. He sees her for who she is: sick, sinner, and rejected by all. And he loves her anyway. And third, **he calls her "daughter"**. He uses an intimate word to bring her close, into his family. It is no wonder that he calls on her to have courage, to be bold, to face him and the world as his daughter. He does not love her because she is lovely: she becomes lovely because he loves her!

Then second, Jesus heals the daughter of the ruler. This ruler asks Jesus to lay his hand on his daughter, but Jesus is no passionless physician. When he comes to the girl, now dead, nothing (not even the mourners) can stop him from bringing her life. He goes to her and seizes her hand, raising her up from the dead. True, he had been led there by the synagogue leader, but it was much his great love for that girl who had been enslaved not just by sickness but by Death itself which brought him to her side.

Through both of these women, and the miracles that Jesus performed in their lives, we catch a glimpse of the character and heart of Jesus, and also of God the Father himself who out of no other compulsion but love sent his Son not just to heal our sicknesses but to raise us up from the grave of sin and death.

If you, beloved in the Lord, find yourself tempted, whether in plenty or in want, to doubt God's compassion, mercy, grace, or love towards you, you must, I implore you, run to this Jesus. Take hold of him, grasp his hand, and be found in him. In his arms, you can never doubt his goodness or love!

### **3. An Absolute Power.**

The second aspect of Jesus' character that Matthew brings to the fore is his absolute power to accomplish what he desires. In these miracles of healing, we see the powers of the Word of God, "the one in the beginning" (John 1:1) "through whom and for whom all things came into being and in whom all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17) wielded in the hands of a Man who "is like us in all respects, except without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

This power is another aspect of the Gospel that I am too often tempted in my own life to consider "too good to be true", especially in my fight against sin. I am most often tempted to doubt Christ's power at stressful points in my life. Sometimes I consider sins that I have acknowledge and confessed, and for which I have pleaded God's help in conquering and yet which still remain in my life. Other times, I have been disappointed in God's delay in answering prayers for myself or for others. In any event, it all adds up to a temptation to doubt God's power and ability to save someone as wretched and awful as myself. Once again, I wish that I were alone in struggling with doubt in this area, but here in the United States I routinely encounter both non-Christians and Christians who harbor skepticism towards God for seemingly unanswered prayers, unconquered sins and urges, and the sensation that the things of earth carry more weight than the things of heaven. Additionally, I have observed outside North America that Christians sometimes incline towards believing in the superior power of witchcraft, magic, or the world of demonic spirits in comparison to the power of Christ's Kingdom of light.

But the passage here from Matthew cannot and will not allow us to entertain such dreary and abominable notions. The effect of Christ's power to save the woman from her chronic blood flow and the girl from sickness and death is absolute and immediate. There is no contest between Jesus and opposing forces: sickness obeys him, the wind and the waves obey him, the demons obey him, and death itself obeys him. He always and immediately wins. But, through the insightful and creative crafting of this passage, Matthew is communicating for us a much more powerful salvation than merely what we find for these two women.

First, we can observe that Christ has the power to take away our guilt before God. The hemorrhaging woman stands in God's people. Cut off from the covenant Lord by impurity, she is the "Daughter of Zion," her twelve years of blood a symbol of the twelve tribes of Israel whose guilt the blood of bulls and goats and lambs could never take away. God's people had waited so long to be released from their guilt and from the wrath of God, and in the coming of Jesus this guilt is removed.

You see, whereas her blood had made her unclean before God, our Lord Jesus Christ shed his own blood on the cross for our sins. He bore our sins, our guilt, and God's wrath on our behalf and nailed them all to the cross. By his blood sacrifice of his body, "made once for all" (Hebrews 10:10) as the Apostle Paul says, we "who were once far off have been brought near" (Ephesians 2:13). We were "enemies of God, strangers to the covenants of promise and cut off from the commonwealth of Israel, without hope and without God in the world" (2:12). And his blood is both sufficient for all our sins and also powerful enough to remove them from us, just as surely as he healed this woman of such chronic disease.

But second, we can observe that Christ has the power to free us from death itself. Just as Jesus willingly rose up to follow this synagogue leader in order to heal his daughter, so he willingly gave life to her dead corpse, despite all the naysayers, and she rose up like him. But this raising of the dead, like many in the ministry of Jesus, was merely a dim foretaste, on the one hand of his own Resurrection to glorious life, and on the other of our own coming Resurrection to glorious life when he comes again. The Apostle Paul says that this power which raised Christ from the dead is working powerfully within us as Christians here and now to give us new life, a new life which Jesus is living forever at the right hand of God the Father (Ephesians 1:19-21). He has ceased to be a "living soul" and has become a "life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45). Indeed, "just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, so we shall bear the image of the Man of Heaven through his absolute power" (15:49). He will "transform our mortal bodies to be like his glorious body by the power by which he is able to subdue all things to himself" (Philippians 3:21). And he can do this as easily as he raised this little girl from the dead.

Jesus not only passionately desires to save you, but he is powerfully able to accomplish it, all of which was secured by his Death and Resurrection. His power now grants us forgiveness of our sins, a new life in the power of the Spirit, adoption as God's sons and daughters, and the hope of glory to come. Can we have any doubt that he who healed this woman and raised this girl, this man who has passed both through death and through the heavens themselves, will bring to completion what he has begun in us? Beloved, if you find yourself tempted to doubt his almighty and saving power, set your eyes on Jesus, consider him and rest in the power of his hand to do everything that he has promised.

#### 4. Conclusion.

As we bring this message to a close, I believe that it is important to integrate the last verse of this passage into what we have been talking about: “And the news of this went out through that whole region.” The news that God in love has had compassion on sinners and has powerfully accomplished their redemption in Christ is not simply to be food for our souls’ faith, but the basis and motivation for taking the message and proclaiming it (as it were) promiscuously to everyone everywhere.

This vignette in Matthew’s Gospel is just one in larger collections of accounts of Jesus’ miracles, leading up climactically to Jesus sending out the Twelve to testify to the merciful advent of God’s Kingdom in Jesus Christ. The person who has truly heard and received the Good News of a Good Savior will and must take that Good News to others who have not yet heard.

And, let us be honest: if we have digested the radical news that “Jesus is the one, and only one, who gives life,” if we have grasped the depths of his loving compassion for us miserable offenders, and if we have experienced “the power of his resurrection and the sharing in his sufferings,” how could we keep quiet about this? What could prevent us from taking it to the highways and byways? What does?

My prayer for you this evening is that this Gospel, this Lord, this saving God will be and continue to be the all-consuming passion of your lives and of your congregation. To this God through this Jesus Christ, as declared by this Gospel and none other, be honor and glory, from you and from the watching world, forever and ever. Amen.

Rev. David B. Alenskis  
Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity (2010)  
Evansville, Indiana