

**Mark 5:21-42 (Healing of Jairus' Daughter)**  
**2 Corinthians 8:7-24**  
**28<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

When I read this story earlier this week, one word leapt to mind, quite unbidden, because it's not a churchy sort of word. But then I wasn't in a churchy mood because I was on holiday and planning my next cream tea. In fact the word might well shock some of you, you might think I shouldn't say it in church, because you might misunderstand what I mean. The word is BOGOF. Now before anyone starts composing a letter to the Bishop, it's an acronym - each letter stands for a word. Can anyone enlighten us? Buy One Get One Free. You see it all over the place these days. In supermarkets mostly, but you even see it in the Church Times. When I read today's gospel I thought, Get one miracle, get another one free. I wonder if that's what the crowd around Jesus thought? They were expecting to see a miracle, that's why vast crowds followed Jesus, because he was a spectacle. You never knew what he was going to say or do next - he was a great teacher, of course, but better than that, he was entertainment. And if you stuck around, you might see a miracle. Well they got what they were waiting for. Along comes Jairus, an important man in the community, a churchwarden in fact, because that was Jairus' job was, he looked after the synagogue and made sure there was someone to take services. Along comes churchwarden Jairus, himself, not sending his servant, pushing his way through to the front of the crowd, because he was terrified. His daughter was very ill, and that was enough to make him risk the disapproval of the community of which he was a leading member and put aside his doubts about who Jesus was and by what power he performed miracles, such is his love of his daughter. And Jesus goes with him, without a word, he just goes. And the crowd tagged along, to see if there would be a miracle.

They were walking quickly, no doubt, because there wasn't any time to waste, then along comes a woman who's been excluded by her community. She'd obviously been quite a wealthy woman, because Mark tells us she'd been to lots of doctors to see if they could cure her. But she's a sad reflection of that now - poor and desperate. She's not like Jairus, expecting Jesus to listen to him and go with him. She wasn't even expecting Jesus to notice her, perhaps even fearful that he'd shy away from her like everyone else did. But she was desperate enough to steal what she wanted from him. But that's not how it turned out. Jesus did notice her and felt her receive healing from him.

I wonder what Jairus thought when Jesus stopped to talk to the woman? Annoyance? Fear that it would be too late for his daughter, or that all Jesus' power had been expended and there would be none left for his daughter? His fears were soon realised when he was told that his daughter had died. How would he have felt towards the woman then? Joy for her? Probably not! It was probably nearer hatred that she had cost him the life of his daughter. But even in that unworthy state, Jesus went with him to prove to him that God's love is not as small as we think it is. That God's love is big enough to encompass two healings in one afternoon, that there is

enough of God's love and power for everyone who needs it and wants it. And the crowd got to see not one healing miracle that day, but two.

You see, the nature of God is self-emptying love. When you ask for his help, like Jairus did, God doesn't ask what you're going to give in return, he doesn't wait to see if you've been good enough to deserve help (there's a sermon about the difference between God and Santa in there somewhere). God doesn't ask questions, he just goes with you into your sharpest pain, your darkest fear, your deepest doubt. And when you're at such a low point that you don't even think God will bother with you, just like the woman who is so insignificant we don't even know her name. Then Jesus stops everything he is doing, no matter how urgent or important it is, he stops just for you. Why? Because there is no-one he would rather be with, there is no-one whose pain he would rather take away. This is the self-emptying love of God in Christ. Poured out for you. One of the most profound observations I've ever heard is this: that if you were the only person in the world, Jesus would still have died for you. You were worth it all.

Paul says it beautiful in 2 Corinthians: For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. This is the self-emptying love of God in Christ. Poured out for you.

What if it's really true? To use Paul's words: here's my advice. You've started well, he says. Well we know that, we're here in God's presence this morning after all. So, says Paul, don't let it all go to waste, don't forget what God has done for you, remember and do something about it.

Paul goes on to talk about giving money to support the work of the gospel. I'm not talking about money this morning, although I will talk about it in the autumn and I'll challenge you to give more to the church because if we don't give to God generously from our wallets as well as our hearts then the work of growing the Kingdom in this community suffers. So while you're sitting there thinking about where else you're going to be on Sundays in the autumn when I'm here reminding you about the need to be generous, I want to share with you a little nugget from a wonderful conference I went on a couple of weeks ago. It was a conference about growing the church and the kingdom of God in communities like Burghfield. It was the best conference I've ever attended, and you'll be hearing a lot more of the wisdom I picked up from it. But here's a wonderful nugget from the conference leader: after telling us about church growth and reminding us that growth is what God does because God wants a living church, and all living things grow. Then he asked a room full of church leaders if we thought we had a sick note from God that would excuse us from working for growth in God's Church.

I was so grateful to be reminded, that God's call to life, to healing, to generosity includes me. That God poured out his life in Jesus for me.

But what about you? Do you want a sicknote from God? Or do you want to be part of the new life he's offering you again today? As that conference leader was my reminder. Here I am, your reminder. You are loved by our great and self-giving God. Halleluia!

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