



JESUIT  
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AFRICA

## Homily 13th Sunday – Year B

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Radical. Transformation. Revolution. These are all words that we often hear in the political arena. One can become quite tired of these words.

And yet, when I looked at the Gospel for this weekend, it struck me that we are reading about something radical, something revolutionary and something transformative. At times, we are so bound by our own context and times that we do not realise how radical, or revolutionary or transformational these events in the Gospels are.

The author of that book of Wisdom looks back over the history of Israel and reflects on how God's wisdom has been active right from the very beginning – a wisdom that is radically different to human wisdom, a revolutionary wisdom, a wisdom that brings about transformation. He affirms, too, in that reading that things did not just come into being, but all were created by God, through God's design.

In that second reading, Paul encourages radical behaviour – he tells the Corinthians to imitate the other Churches by sending financial help to the poor in Jerusalem. You see, radical economic transformation is not a new concept that some political party has suddenly dreamt up. It is at the heart of the early Christian community.

He tells the Corinthians that they need to take special responsibility for the church in Jerusalem, the so-called "mother church" of the time. And he argues, using a briefer version of the hymn of the Philippians, that to do this would be living the example of Jesus himself, who himself was rich and emptied himself for our sake. A real message of responsibility and a radical sharing and transformation.

In the Gospel, Mark presents us with these two stories – we call these, or Scripture scholars call these, a Markan sandwich – both of which are remarkable stories. A story starts, another story is inserted, and then the first story ends. These stories portray a wonderful picture of God's nature and tell us something about how radical, and revolutionary, and transformative Jesus is. So I want to take a look at those parables.

First of all, we are told that there are two women. And this is significant because the society that Jesus lived in was a society that was sexist – women were not just simply second-class citizens. They were possessions of their fathers, of their husbands, their brothers, their sons. Girl children were not important at all. It was much more prized if you had a son. And so women were dispensable. So by asking Jesus to come and see a young woman, who is not named, who is not identified (notice: the daughter of Jairus), she's only a somebody because of her father, and then having Jesus touch her is radical. Women were not really "people", and they certainly were not afforded any rights. And so by doing this, Jesus immediately is a radical, is a revolutionary, is doing something transformative. He affords that young, unnamed woman dignity and respect. He gives her "personhood" and gives her life in the literal and spiritual sense.

Perhaps it's not obvious, but still, many women in our midst are treated as possessions. The rise of things like the #MeToo campaign reminds us that women are not treated with dignity and respect today. The dignity and respect that is their due made in the image and likeness of God. And it's easy for us in the church so often to speak about the dignity and respect of women in society. Yet inside our very own ranks, we too notice, if we're sharp enough, that women are often treated as second-class citizens. And maybe even religious women, most especially, are treated as second-class citizens.

This calls forth for us, or from us, a radical response, in the same way that Jesus radically responded to what he found in his own context. In fact, not responding means we do not take our discipleship of Jesus seriously. Because it is a demand of our discipleship, it's the transformation that the Gospel demands of us – to see others, to see women, to see our world, through transformed eyes. And therefore, even at times, we have to critique the very institutions, like the church we belong to.

The second thing is to notice those desperate situations. Notice how radical Jesus is in desperate situations. Both of those women, Jairus' daughter and the other unnamed woman, are in hopeless situations. Doctors have failed, the Gospel tells us. The mourners are ready at the house of Jairus. There is a real sense of hopelessness in both accounts. And notice how Jesus transforms that hopelessness. Many people today live in desperate situations. They feel desperate. Many women today live in desperate situations. They feel hopeless. We know too that in our society, things like suicide rates are up. Lots of young people feel disempowered. They live in townships, where very often there's no water and there are no lights because of the poor governance of this country. They are unemployed. The unemployment rate in this country continues to spiral up and up and up, no matter all the political rhetoric we are given about creating jobs. We have a government that has failed.

And yet, the Gospel reminds us that there is no situation that is beyond redemption. There is no situation in which the power of God cannot prevail. But, just as Jairus goes to seek Jesus out, and just as that woman who touches Jesus' cloak goes to seek him out, we too are called to do something in desperate situations.

That's a big challenge. Jesus' actions in the Gospel, his death and resurrection are the basis for our Christian HOPE. He invites us to be signs of hope, creators of hope through our words and our actions. Our lives are meant to be signs all the time of hope, especially to those who feel desperate. Our faith is at times tested, and yet the power of God can prevail in any situation. When people like us choose to work in partnership with God, when we choose to be messengers of hope, when we choose to take the same radical, and revolutionary, and transformative attitude that Jesus has, we too can slowly change the situations, the desperate situations, which people find themselves in. When we choose to no longer put up with those who create those desperate situations, we are choosing to let the power of God prevail. Many things can be better for many people in this country if we choose to no longer put up with the bad governance, the failed governance that we sit with.

And the third and final thing is to notice the healing in that story. Both accounts are stories of healing. So often, we want "quick fixes". And I think maybe even that woman in the Gospel was looking for a "quick fix". That's why she simply just touches the cloak of Jesus. Who blames her after being sick for so long that now she's looking desperately for a quick fix? It would have, perhaps even, been easier simply for Jesus to offer her a quick fix. Yet, she touches Jesus. She knows somehow that the touch of Jesus will cure her. And we can do nothing but admire her faith.

Notice that healing is not just simply a physical thing. We are told that she is in "fear and trembling" when Jesus turns around. So often, we emphasise the physical. She is healed physically. Yet, she still suffers from fear and trembling. And then, we are told, Jesus sets her totally free by healing her from her own emotional and intellectual suffering.

Healing is a big subject, and we often talk about it in the churches. Many of these mega-churches or "evangelicals", or whatever you want to call it, try to make us believe that healing is something that is instant. And yet, over and over in the Gospels, we notice that is not the case. Notice how God works. Healing is always a process in the scriptures. Healing is always multi-layered in the scriptures. She may have physical healing, and yet still, Jesus has to heal her emotionally and psychologically.

And we need to remember that in our own lives. And so too when we deal with people who are desperate. We think that perhaps giving something physically, food or clothes or whatever it is can help them, and indeed it does. But often, too, we skip altogether that deeper layer where people need emotional and psychological healing from what they have suffered. We only see this when we take a radical, or a revolutionary or a transformative view as Jesus himself has.

Let's pray as we celebrate the Eucharist this weekend that we would work to afford all people their God-given dignity and respect, that we would work to eradicate anything that strips anyone of their dignity, especially that of women, and in our own context, religious women. Let's pray that we would be signs of hope to those who feel desperate. And let's pray that we would recognise how God calls us to be healers, not just simply offer people physical healing, but calls us, invites us to create spaces where people can find emotional and psychological healing.

The revolutionary, radical and transformative power of the Gospel will only take root in our hearts and help us to create the kind of world that God desires, the kind of society that God would recognise. The one that images the Kingdom, when we have the courage to take on that radical, that revolutionary, that transformative attitude that Jesus displays so often in the Gospels.