



Blessed Be

December 2023

This edition of Blessed Be comes to you with our best wishes for a peaceful and blessed Christmas.

If you have anything you wish to contribute to Blessed Be, or any suggestions you'd like to make, please contact me at helenmacauley@gmail.com

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*We begin this edition with an offering from **Tricia Gemmell**. It is the start of her reflection in the book, **In Her Voice***

## **Jesus invites a woman to preach – Mark 5:21-43**

The cure of the woman with a haemorrhage is told within the story of the raising to life of Jairus' daughter. It is worth mentioning that this gospel is often read in church in its shorter version, with the older woman's story omitted. When we do this, we effectively silence her voice.

There could hardly be a stronger contrast than that between Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, and the unnamed woman suffering a haemorrhage. He is rich, powerful, a man of influence respected by society, who has no hesitation speaking to Jesus to beg for his help. She, on the other hand, is destitute, diseased, voiceless, shunned by society, and too ashamed to approach Jesus other than touch his tunic from behind. At the moment she touches him, Jesus is already on an emergency mission, hastening to save the life of a little girl at the point of death. But he stops and turns. How must Jairus have felt when he saw that woman come forward and take all of Jesus' attention? She came slowly, reluctantly, in fear and trembling, fell before him, and, according to Mark, told Jesus the whole truth.

Sit with these words. She told him the whole truth. There is a world of meaning and so much to be pondered in these few words.

If we think back to Chapter 1 of Mark's gospel, when Jesus first taught in the synagogue, we will remember that they were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them with authority. Here, in front of the jostling crowds and in front of one of the leaders of the synagogue, Jesus gives this unnamed woman authority to teach. He invites this woman to tell the good news to those around him, in her own words. He invites her, surely, does he not, to preach to the assembly? I see a leader of the synagogue presiding, in the presence of Jesus and a crowd of his followers. It looks like church to me.

Mark leaves it to us to imagine what she might have said.

There is no doubt that we see in this story Jesus' preferential option for the poor. This apparently worthless woman is worth saving. What is less obvious is the fact that Jesus gives this woman in the assembly, a voice that evangelises her first listeners, but is also meant to evangelise us. She does so with the whole truth of her story.

Maybe Jesus too was changed in that encounter with her strong faith. After she speaks, he addresses her as "my daughter." What love and tenderness she must have called forth in him. He commends her faith and sends her home in peace.

What did Jairus, distraught about *his* own daughter, see, hear, and feel, in that moment when Jesus addressed this unknown woman as his daughter? I wonder how Jairus might have been changed that day. Did he see things in a new way? Was his heart expanded?

How would our church be changed if our leaders stopped and listened to the truth of women's stories? How much would the voice of women in the assembly enrich our understanding of God's saving power?

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*Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was a Russian novelist, short story writer, essayist and journalist in 19th-century Russia. His novels include **Crime and Punishment** (1866), **The Idiot** (1869), **Demons** (1872), and **The Brothers Karamazov** (1880). Here are three quotes from him:*

~Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth. Love all God's creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day, and you will come at last to love the world with an all-embracing love.

~All writers, not ours alone but foreigners also, who have sought to represent Absolute Beauty, were unequal to the task, for it is an infinitely difficult one. The beautiful is the ideal; but ideals, with us as in civilized Europe, have long been wavering. There is in the world only one figure of absolute beauty: Christ. That infinitely lovely figure is, as a matter of course, an infinite marvel.

~ If you are penitent, you love. And if you love you are of God. All things are atoned for, all things are saved by love. If I, a sinner even as you are, am tender with you and have pity on you, how much more will God have pity upon you. Love is such a priceless treasure that you can redeem the whole world by it, and cleanse not only your own sins but the sins of others.

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The Christmas spirit that goes out with the dried up Christmas tree is just as worthless. ~  
*Anon*

Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home. ~ *G,K,Chesterton*

*As Christmas approaches, we contemplate the birth of Jesus, and its meaning.*

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (4 February 1906 – 9 April 1945) was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident. He was executed in 1945 having been convicted of plotting to kill Hitler.

And then, just when everything is bearing down on us to such an extent that we can scarcely withstand it, the Christmas message comes to tell us that all our ideas are wrong, and that what we take to be evil and dark is really good and light because it comes from God. Our eyes are at fault, that is all. God is in the manger, wealth in poverty, light in darkness, succour in abandonment. No evil can befall us; whatever men may do to us, they cannot but serve the God who is secretly revealed as love and rules the world and our lives.

I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.  
~ **Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol** (1843)

His mother bore him in her womb; let us bear him in our hearts. The virgin was big with the incarnation of Christ; let our bosoms grow big with the faith of Christ. She gave birth to the Saviour; let us give birth to praise. ~ **Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 189** (c. 400)

*This is a description of Muhammad's birth written by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalan, in Fath Al-Bari in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century:*

A 1000 year-old fire, which was being worshipped, was extinguished in Persia. The lake of Sawah, which was also worshiped, dried up at the Prophet's birth. His mother, Aminah, mentioned that she did not suffer any of the usual pains of pregnancy as with other women. Prior to his birth, she also dreamt that she gave birth to a tremendous light that extended to the Palaces of Busra in Syria. On the night he was born it was reported that an immense light immersed from her that lit up the entire house.

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*Here is the **Pavamana Mantra** from the **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad**, an early Hindu text dated to the 7th-6th Century BCE:*

Om, lead me from the unreal to the real.
Lead me from darkness to light.
Lead me from death to immortality.

May peace be, may peace be, may peace be.

Lead us from illusion to the real.
Lead us from darkness to light.
Lead us from death to eternal life.

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*Sun Bu'er* was a Taoist nun in 12<sup>th</sup> Century China. She was married and had three children. At age 51 she began to study the Tao. After 12 years she attained the Tao and began teaching. She wrote many poems. Here is one of them:

The great forge produces mountains and waters,  
Containing therein the potential of creation.  
In the morning, greet the energy of the sun;  
At night, inhale the vitality of the moon.  
In time the elixir can be culled;  
With the years, the body naturally lightens.  
Where the original spirit comes and goes,  
Myriad apertures emit radiant light.

Before our body existed,  
One energy was already there.  
Like jade, more lustrous as it's polished,  
Like gold, brighter as it's refined.  
Sweep clear the ocean of birth and death,  
Stay firm by the door of total mastery.  
A particle at the point of open awareness,  
The gentle firing is warm.

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And finally a poem by **Christina Rosetti**, first published in 1885. It has since been put to music by a number of composers.

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,
Worship we our Jesus,
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

