

GOSPEL WONDERS

A different way to look at the gospels

Jairus' daughter (suggested) Order of Service

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(all hymns from Singing the Faith)

Introduction

He sat quietly in the corner of the courtyard thinking of the happenings of the last forty-eight hours. The evening sun warmed him and the rich red wine he swirled in the bowl in his hand reflected back the rays of the setting sun.

In the last two days he had experienced so many emotions that it was difficult to sort them all out. From a confident and respected man. One who was looked up to in the community he had felt fear and a gnawing anxiety which, in turn, became desperation as the situation reached its most crucial point. That point where he could do nothing but pray and trust in a power beyond himself.

It was now time to try to understand what it was all about. But that understanding was difficult to come by. He realised that those he loved, the two most important people in his life had been at risk. One the risk of her very life and the other of her mental stability and that there was nothing that he, with all his importance could do about it.

So, he sat there watching the evening shadows lengthening and realised that he had been blessed. That a power beyond himself had reached out and blessed him and that the only response was to give thanks. To acknowledge that power. Give thanks, praise and adoration and accept his own faults and narrow mindedness and seek forgiveness. This, he accepted was the time. He closed his eyes and allowed the words to come.

Opening Prayers

We too have much to be thankful for. So, let us rest in his care, accept his forgiveness, close our eyes and offer our thanks.

When we look at our lives Lord, we find much to be grateful for. The most important being the way in which, at our moments of greatest need, you are there.

Life tests us in so many ways that we need to step aside from the rush of life and think of you. Like the wine swirling around in the bowl we send out flashes of light but just like the wine need to be still for our true beauty to show.

We come to you now laying our lives before you, thanking you for the beauty in them. We thank you for the gifts and blessings we share and acknowledge that without you we are very much alone and helpless. Like those in our story we acknowledge you as the power in our lives.

In that knowledge we must also accept that like them we often fail to acknowledge our faults and once again, seeking forgiveness in the knowledge that if we ask sincerely it will be granted.

Period of silence

Through the life and resurrection of our Lord Jesus we know that our sins are forgiven.

AMEN

Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The story of Jairus' daughter

The story teller and two characters: Hannah and her mother

Story teller: Our story today concerns a very important man, his family and servants and a wandering teacher who it was said could perform miracles.

The rabbi has been visiting a place called Gadara near the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee and was now returning by boat to the western bank. He was well known and, as a result, when the news got around that he was there a crowd gathered to meet him. He was soon surrounded by people pushing and jostling trying to get close. They either wanted to hear what he had to say, see if he was going to perform any miracles, you know, make sick people well, that sort of thing, or even wanted to ask him for a miracle.

Very few, if any people in the crowd would have had an idea of the drama that was being played out in a house not far from the centre of town. It was one of the bigger houses, obviously the home of a rich man and his family. Somebody of importance. Somebody most people would have looked up to a man of substance, a man to be admired even envied. But not today. Today, this normally well run and efficient home was in chaos. Why you may ask. The little daughter of the house was ill, seriously ill. She was the only child of loving parents. Her mother had lost two earlier children in childbirth and one, the son of the house had died from fever when he was two and this little one had nearly died being born. For that matter the mother had nearly died as well. She couldn't have any more and that made this one so special. Well! You can imagine what it was like for all of them, but particular the child's nurse.

Hannah: Well, it only started yesterday. She got up as normal but I noticed that she didn't eat her breakfast as enthusiastically as she normally did. Usually, she has an appetite of an ox but then with all the running about she does she needs the energy. Anyway, I didn't pay too much attention but then at lunchtime I noticed she was a bit flushed but it wasn't until she said that she wanted to lie down that I started to worry. Normally I have a bit of a fight to get her to rest in the heat of the day. Then she was sick. Now I was worried. I went looking for the mistress.

To cut a long story short, the doctor came and gave us something to give to her and that was that. All we could do was sit with her and try to keep her cool with damp cloths and a fan. The waiting was terrible. The master had been called from his work at the synagogue and we just sat there as it got dark.

Mother: When Hannah called me I must admit I felt as though a hand was gripping my heart. I panicked. This couldn't be happening. Not to our dear one. Not again, I thought dear Lord God, not again.

Well, there we sat. Dear Hannah refused to leave the bedside. Jairus just sat staring at the bed. I could see from his lips that he was praying. And me? I felt so helpless. My insides churned. I felt sick. The cook brought in some food but none of us could eat. Hannah and the other servants wanted me to go to bed, so, they argued I would be strong in the morning to look after the little one, but I couldn't leave. Not when my angel needed me. I got them to bring in a mattress and lay down and despite everything, I did keep dosing off. When I woke nothing had changed. Jairus was still sitting there staring. I don't think he moved all night. Hannah was at the bedside and I could hear her praying quietly.

Hannah: Adonai, great Lord take our dear one into your arms and heal her. Give her back to us. You are the great and merciful one. Hear my prayer and take her into the palm of your hand and take away the fever. Great Lord I pray, save our dear one.

Mother: Apart from that, all was still in the house, only the child's breathing breaking the silence of the room.

Then it was dawn. I woke to knocking at the door.

Our steward, Matthew came in and whispered to Jairus. At first, he looked angry and muttered something about what they wanted now. Then he got up and went out.

I didn't know who it was. I heard raised voices but paid little attention. Then Matthew came in and said the master had gone to get a healer.

Hannah: After the master left, we washed our girl to cool her down and then just sat, one at each side of the bed. Each with our own thoughts and prayers. The little one breathing noisily between us.

Mother: Then almost without us realising it, her breathing went quiet and stopped. At first, we did not realise what had happened, and then, almost at the same time, it hit us. She was gone. We stood up in horror and then fell into each other's arms crying. We found it difficult to understand and accept what had happened. Then the harsh reality hit us and the practicalities of what we needed to do. A message was sent for our rabbi to come and another to find Jairus and bring him home. What had happened after he left the room; I did not know but I needed him now. I needed him very badly. I needed his strength, so wherever he was, he had to come home.

Bartholomew's story

I'll tell you what happened! When Jairus came out of the child's room he was angry. Didn't we know what was happening? Couldn't whatever we had come about waited or couldn't we have dealt with it ourselves?

It was some time before he calmed down enough for us to tell him why we were there.

Yes! We did know about his child and that was why we were here. The two of us. That's me, Bartholomew and my friend Nathan. We had heard about his child and we had also heard that Jesus, the new teacher, that some people said was able to do miracles, had just got out of a boat at the lakeside and was staying in the town. We were not, we explained there to give him more problems than he had already, but, and a very big but, would it be worth going to see him. It was just possible that he might be able to help.

He blew up. Didn't we know the sort of things this man had been saying and doing? Didn't we know that they had sent people down from Jerusalem to check up on what he had been doing and saying? How would it look if he, the ruler of the synagogue, someone looked up to for spiritual and moral guidance was seen going to ask a favour of this man. Good heavens! It would look as though he supported him.

We waited until he finished and then made the point that there was nobody else around who was able to do anything for this child so why not at least talk to the man. After all, look at the alternatives.

He calmed down, sent a message to his wife that he was going to find a healer and stalked out of the house with the two of us following on behind.

Jesus was easy enough to find – we just had to find the crowd. Jairus marched ahead in his best "important man" style and the crowd parted to let him through. By this time, I had dropped behind so I didn't hear what was said, but I saw what happened.

The crowd fell back to let him through and then he was standing face to face with the man he had come to see. They were of similar height so looked into each other's eyes. Jesus did not say anything but just raised one eyebrow as a sort of question and the most amazing thing I have ever seen, Jairus just crumpled. This man so used to being seen as important and a leader of the community fell to his knees at Jesus feet and burst into tears. Great sobs shook his body and try as he might, he could not speak. The crowd went silent. Amazed at what was happening before their eyes. If Jesus wanted to score points this would have been his opportunity, but he didn't. He bent down, lifted Jairus to his feet and spoke to him. It was so quiet that none of us could hear. Jairus nodded and they set off towards his house.

On the way they met the servant with the message that the child had died and again, Jairus' face became a mask of absolute despair but Jesus just took his arm and the carried on.

Now, because we were caught up in the crowd, we didn't get back into the house so I don't know what happened in there, but I can tell you it must have been something spectacular.

Matthew, His Wife and Hannah

Three characters: Matthew the steward, his wife the cook, and Hannah.

The cook

What happened inside the house? A good question! My husband Matthew, the steward was in the middle of it and he was not quite sure what happened. As cook I was in and out of the kitchen so most of what I heard was from some of the other servants. We knew of course that the child was ill. Young Hannah, the nurse was all pale and worried. I think we all had a sleepless night. The master, mistress and Hannah were at her bedside all night. I took a tray in but it came back untouched. Then in the morning the master's friends, Nathan and Bartholomew came and Matthew said that there were some harsh words spoken. Then they all went out, the master telling Matthew to tell the mistress that he was going for a healer. Then we heard crying from the bedroom and realised the worst had happened. The mistress sent for Matthew with a string of messages about sending for the master and the rabbi, and getting some professional mourners in and it all got a bit noisy. I realised that there were going to be a lot of people coming and going so I vanished into the kitchen to organise the food and didn't know what had happened until the message came down that the child was alive and that we had guest for lunch. I will leave it to Matthew to tell you what happened.

Matthew the steward.

What happened? Well, that is a good question and no mistake. I've been asked that question a number of times and still don't have a sensible answer.

You know about the little one taking ill. Affected the whole household, I can tell you. Proper bright spark she was. Always laughing and singing. Energy! Never seen anything like her. She ran everywhere. My wife tells me she was forever in the kitchen looking for sweet things to pinch, but she was always interested in what was going on and willing to do a bit of helping out. Nothing seemed to put her out of sorts so it came as a real shock to hear that she was ill.

Then she was dead. We were all in shock and I was very busy trying to get things organised. The last thing I wanted was the master bringing home this teacher and his gang. Suddenly there are a dozen or so people in the entrance and the leader himself is saying that the child isn't dead, only asleep. How would he know? He had only just walked in.

Anyway, he takes three of his people and goes into the child's room (and leaves the rest under my feet) and sends everyone else out. Young Hannah was not too happy at being turned out and sat staring at the closed door. Then the door opened and the

mistress was asking for some food, the child's favourites, to be brought. The next thing, there is the little one, looking a bit pale, with the mistress.

I still don't know what happened that day but the master was never the same again. Somehow, he became more sort of human, since his meeting with Jesus. It's taken some of the starch out of him. He's a much nicer man to know and interestingly it seems that people somehow have more confidence in him.

Mind you, the master and mistress weren't the only ones changed. Hannah too was a changed person. Such a difference in her. Now Jesus is her favourite word.

Hannah

I had prayed so hard that my little one would be alright, but it was not to be. I had heard Jesus before and I believed in him, but because of my master's position I had never been able to tell anyone how I felt. I knew the things he had done so when he came into the house, I was filled with hope. I was hurt when he shut me out. That seemed so cruel when I just wanted to be with her. But suddenly, they were asking for her favourite food. Then there she stood, pale but alive. I ran and threw my arms around her, laughing and crying at the same time, tears running down my face. That was only the beginning. Now I no longer have to keep my love for Jesus to myself, I can tell everyone and I was filled with such joy.

Conclusion

So, we come to the end of our story. In this case, a happy ending. In such circumstances many children would have died. Sickness was common and could strike quickly and violently with a rapid conclusion. It was also the case that, although there were skilled doctors, the tools available to them were limited when compared with the arsenal of treatments available in modern medicine.

When this child fell ill, everybody concerned would have been aware of the very high probability that she would die and this must have weighed down on the household like a dark cloud.

Those we have heard from all viewed the situation from a different perspective. All of them suffering in different ways. The parents would have been torn by the worry and grief that the beloved one was so ill and much sympathy particularly, would have been for the mother. But what of the father? A man with status; a position to uphold; a rule of life that focused his thinking. It took a good friend to dare to suggest the unthinkable to him and when in his desperation he accepted their idea it took great courage on his part to act on it. Then this man looked into the eyes of Jesus and all the tension, all the pain, all the worry and yes, all the anger at the situation was released and he collapsed. Suddenly, in front of the crowd he became a human being. A man tormented by a situation that was beyond his control. He put everything into the hands of the man in front of him. Not only his child's life but his trust and faith were on the line and it was all laid out in front of a crowd of people. A broken man waiting to be re-made.

The Hannah. What do we make of her? Feeling unable to talk of this wonderful man she had met because she was afraid that she would be punished, or worse still, laughed at or shouted down. Not an unusual situation for any of us you may think. Many of us have been there at one time or another. Afraid to talk about Him. Sometimes possibly losing the opportunity to change someone's life. Then, when the floodgates opened, the world changed.

How often does this happen with Jesus? Life throws many challenges at us. Some we manage, others leave us helpless and on our knees before him. With Jairus, even when the news got worse, he continued to trust. Jesus remained beside him.

Some things do not change. The world continues to test us, knock us off balance, leaving us on our knees feeling helpless to act against impossible forces that are working against us. It is at times such as these that we remember His presence.

Prayers of intercession

Heavenly Father, we spend a lot of time talking to you about ourselves. We have so many needs. Help us today to think of others.

We pray for people weighed down by worry. Anxious people who don't know where to turn. Who don't know whose door to knock on, bewildered by the suffering and inequality they meet at every step. People without choices, whose only way is down. Somehow Lord, in the turmoil of survival, in the questioning and the doubts, show yourself to them. Let them find you, not in the abstract, not in the smooth words of the practiced preacher, but in a hand held out to help. In shared tears and in the silence that says everything, without words. May they recognise your purposes for them and learn that your will for them is good.

Help us, each one of us, to face things as they are. And though the world has forgotten the architect's plans; though the builders ignore the blueprint, and the foundations shake with every pressure, shelter us with your presence. Help us with your presence. Help us to see you at work, not only in the good days but in the bad and to know, beyond doubt, not through others words, but our own experience that you work together for us, for good.

We know the answer has to begin with us. Maybe we can't do a lot (more than we know, did I hear you say?) but we can do something. Together with you, we can spread your love around. Show us how. So that through us, today, someone will catch a glimpse of your love; may find new life and hope; may find the open door into your kingdom.

And Lord, as we pray for people in need, as we hear the crying far away, let us not be deaf to the cry next door.

We ask these our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

Blessing

(taken from hymn 594 Verse 3)

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have come to us,
born as one of us,
Mary's son;
led out to die in Calvary,
risen from death to set us free,
living Lord Jesus, help us see
You are Lord.

Followed by the sharing of the Grace.