

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018**  
**Trinity 5 (B)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Wisdom 1.13-15;2.23-24**  
**NT: 2 Corinthians 8.7-end**  
**G: Mark 5.21-end**

“And He told them to give her something to eat.”

For those of you who were present for the party after my ordination to the diaconate last week, it will come of no surprise to learn that I come from a very odd family. Even my father who is, ostensibly, one of the more normal members of the clan had his fair share of odd habits in earlier life. My grandmother tells of how it was almost impossible to take him to parties with other children as he developed the curious habit of identifying his possessions, the shoes, jumpers, or toys etcetera that belonged to him not by sight but by smell, with many a concerned hostess telephoning to inform her that her son had been found nose deep in a pile of shoes trying to identify which pair was his.

Part of the issue with such behaviour, of course, was that the sensory is necessarily intimate- especially those senses that are not auditory or visual- namely, touch, taste, and smell. If I were to tell you that I saw the Rector or heard the Rector, you might well think nothing of it. If I were to tell you that I had smelt, touched, or tasted him, I imagine this would be a very short curacy indeed.

Part of the conceptualisation of the Divine more generally and, in parts of the Old Testament, of the first person in the Holy Trinity, God the Father particularly, is that they are explicitly beyond the sensory capabilities of you or I. To be touched, or tasted, or smelt, even, in some cases, to be seen or heard, is to enter into a form of comparable relationship, to be conceivable to the other and therefore, to be intimate and so to be vulnerable. To be conceived of sensorially by ones fellow human beings naturally opens up the possibility of

being judged, of not looking or sounding or feeling 'right' whatever right might mean in the senses of the beholder. To open God up to such judgement by mere mortals seems to go against all our concepts of the omnipotent majesty of the divine. And yet, in our lesson from the Holy Gospel today, God the Son, Jesus Christ, lord of time, vanquisher of Hell, the most worthy lamb who receives the worship of billions on earth and myriad more in the highest Heaven does exactly that- he is experienced by the senses of a human, a ritually unclean and rejected human at that, he is touched.

That touch, that moment of intimacy is risky. Not only for Christ as he opens up the relational bond with the woman but also for the woman herself. We get a glimpse of her internal monologue as she says 'if I but touch his clothes, I will be made well'. She comes, crucially, in faith. Such a leap, to act on faith is not an easy one. In many ways our worship here on earth is necessarily a series of leaps of faith- for now we see, as St Paul tells us, using yet another sensory metaphor, through a glass darkly, but then face to face. We are here today to encounter God, and so have made that first, risky leap. The woman's decision to touch Christ is transgressive, it is brave, it is a leap of faith, and so too is our decision to come here, with the hope of encountering the God of all glory today.

The crucial dynamic of the affair is, of course, the response of Christ to this touch, to this intimate breach of the sensory rules that we imagine govern not only our human society but also the whole cosmological order? He heals. Our God, then, is not the far off and untouchable, but one who invites us to know Him through touch, who invites us to come to him in faith and feel, physically, his presence with us, in word, in one another, and in the sacrament.

There are other intimate senses which pervade this story too. Firstly Christ uses the phrase 'talitha cum', calling the girl by an intimate, almost pet name, so it is that he calls us, quietly,

intimately, with knowledge of our truest selves. He demonstrates a knowledge of her condition that causes others to laugh him to scorn and yet, he is proved correct. So it is with us. God calls to us from a position of knowing our innermost selves, beyond the knowledge others have of us, beyond, even the knowledge we think we have of us.

Perhaps more importantly, however, Christ, having healed the daughter of Jairus is naturally concerned for her. His command is a simple one, that she should be fed. So it is too with us. By his passion and glorious resurrection Christ has completed the ultimate act of healing for a wounded and broken human race, by his death he has triumphed over all death for us and for ever. What then does he offer to us now? He gives us something to eat. And not just anything, but his very self. That we might know that by him we might know and partake in that righteousness of which we heard in our first reading from the Book of Wisdom- that righteousness that is immortal.

Therein lies, my friends, the great miracle of the Christian faith, the great miracle that is our faith. The joyful fact that drags us out of bed and brings us here, that is at the centre of our worship and our creeds, that has sustained billions before us and billions after us; namely that that dominion of Hades, the powers of death and Hell are defeated not in some great cosmic military campaign, but by taste and touch. That our God, is not made known by spell or incantation, by sacrifice or bargain, but by taste and touch. That intimate, the seals of inter-relational human love, our very senses themselves are the chosen receptors of glory. That by tasting and touching God in Christ we will not taste or be touched by death. Paul writes to the Corinthians in our second lesson that 'the one who had little did not have too little'. What we can give, what we can do, might seem like it is little, futile even, in the face of the greatness of God, it might seem too little, even, to overcome the manifest darkness that we so often see. And yet this is the God that makes himself known, who shows His power, who announces his victory in those small and oh so intimate actions- in taste and in

touch. Come forth to his table now, touch and taste, know Him and know that you are known and loved by Him. Come, taste, and see that the Lord is so very good.

AMEN.

Fr Fergus Butler-Gallie