

There's a lot about touch in our gospel reading. Maybe it sounds unfamiliar after so long spent 2 meters away from everyone. Crowds are jostling together, but also, more deliberately, healing is by touch - Jairus expects his daughter to be healed by the laying on of hands. The woman touches Jesus's garment. And when Jesus heals Jairus' daughter, he takes her by the hand.

But it's also interesting how the 2 healings we heard about are intertwined. Jairus tells Jesus about his daughter and he sets off to heal her. Accompanied by a big crowd. But just as, unbeknown to them, the girl is dying, we are interrupted by the healing of the woman suffering from hemorrhages. Then, once she has been healed and has spoken with Jesus, we're on our way again and can wake up the young girl.

I wonder if there's something important there, that in a sense for Jairus's daughter to be healed, the older woman had to be healed first.

Jairus was clearly an important person; being leader of the synagogue carried considerable power but was a position given to people who were already powerful figures in the community. He wanted the best for his daughter and so sought out the man who was rumoured to be able to do extraordinary healings.

The other woman, on the other hand, was an outcast. She was poor, at least now she had given all she had to useless doctors, and under the purity laws of the time, her condition excluded her from society. For twelve years, for the entire lifetime of Jairus's daughter, she had been an outcast.

But in God's eyes, all life is precious and all life is connected. The rich cannot simply be healed on their own, leaving the poor to suffer. For the rich to truly be made whole, the poor who they have excluded must be healed and welcomed back. Jairus may only have been thinking about his daughter, and I'd imagine that any father whose daughter is seriously ill would be, but that's not how it's going to work.

To put it into contemporary terms, here's a parable for you: Those of us in London need to sit up and notice when cases of coronavirus start to rise in distant northern towns like Bolton; it will reach us soon enough. Or, thinking globally, even when we are all vaccinated in the UK, we can't completely rest easy as a vaccine-resistant strain might arise in a faraway country about whose people we know nothing. If we want to protect ourselves, it's especially important we protect the weakest in society.

Of course in the case of coronavirus, we can see the connection. We understand how events in Bolton or India are going to impact our lives. But this is the way that God always sees the world. Remember when a lawyer asked Jesus 'who is my neighbour' and Jesus replied with the parable of the good samaritan.

But not only must everyone be healed, everyone must be recognised for who they are. The girl is healed, not with some great ceremony of laying on of hands as her father seemed to expect, but taking her by the hand and speaking to her tenderly. The older woman's rather unconventional approach, sneaking up on Jesus through the crowd to touch his cloak, was accepted, although Jesus does talk to her rather than letting her sneak away un-noticed as

she might have preferred. Even Jairus is accepted for who he is; Jesus, his disciples and all the crowd following head off to perform the grand laying on of hands he expects rather than Jesus just healing his daughter at a distance as he did with the centurion's servant or making some comment about camels and the eye of a needle.

Had everything gone back to normal on Monday, this would have been the first weekend without social distancing. Did anyone have any cancelled plans for this weekend involving jostling crowds in packed spaces? Or were you planning to slowly get back to normal. Either way, we've got a bit longer to wait before jostling crowds come back, but when we start to bump into strangers again in crowded bars, tube trains, markets or wherever, let's remember the deeper connections that truly exist between us and the strangers we bump into.