

God of the Bible, God in the gospel, hope seen in Jesus, hope yet to come, through these words and in our meditations, open us to your active presence in our lives. Amen

What brings you to your knees? .... Fear; suffering, gratitude?

What are you willing to risk for your faith? ... Friends; social status; everything, nothing?

Today's scripture reading offers us two interlocking stories. First, there is Jairus, a leader in the synagogue. Respected, honoured, influential. He should not be hooking up with some transient preacher who promises things only God can provide.

Yet Jairus risks it all, his position of authority, status in the temple, respect in the community; he risks it all and falls at Jesus' feet, begging that his young daughter be found worthy of Jesus' attention, blessed by his healing.

Sometimes, the thing that brings us to our knees, the only thing that matters, is the health and well-being of our loved ones.

Then there's the hemorrhaging woman, her status and respect in the community have already been lost to her. She is unclean in the eyes of temple authorities. Jairus, and others in his position, wouldn't give this unclean woman the time of day. She is a social outcast, because of her poor health.

This unclean, unnamed woman knows this and, despite her faith that Jesus' is the one who can heal her, she doesn't dare approach him with her request. Instead, she stumbles along with the crowd, making her way ever closer to Jesus, until the fingertips of her outstretched hand can brush against his robe. All the time risking being seen, being chased away and chastised, for daring to get so close. But a touch, she believes, will be all that she needs, to be restored to health.

In some ways, she is correct. The instant she touches Jesus' robe, she knows she has stopped hemorrhaging. But then Jesus, aware of the touch, lays witness to the healing, by stopping and seeking her out.

At this point, the woman knows she's been found out and drops to her knees in gratitude and humility for her brazen actions. Jesus could have reprimanded her, accused her of assuming and taking without asking. But in front of the gathered crowd, Jesus names her as "daughter" acknowledges her strength of faith and in doing so, blesses and restores her back into the community.

Sometimes the thing that brings us to our knees is deep humility; sometimes it's overwhelming gratitude.

But sometimes, like Jairus, despite risking it all and dropping to our knees, our faith waivers, uncertain as to when or how or even if, our desires, our prayers, will come to fruition.

What if my faith isn't strong enough; my prayers not loud enough; my words lacking in clarity. What if I and my concerns are of little importance in the grand scheme of things?

"Do not fear, only believe." Jesus reminds Jairus, and us. Because despite how it may appear, our requests, our faith, our longings, are not lost on God.

When we are driven to our knees, Christ is present and attentive, working in ways we can't begin to comprehend.

The challenge for us today, of course, is that we don't always see the kind of healing that we read about in scripture; that instantaneous revival of health, wellness and life. Cancer doesn't usually just disappear, sick children aren't suddenly made well, and for the most part, when you die, well, you die. There is no coming back from that!

I used to have a children's book that I have lost. I'm sorry I don't know the author and don't recall the name of it. But I remember the story well. It tells of a small bird in the forest who flies effortlessly through the branches and leaves. So beautiful are her flying techniques, that the other forest animals nickname her "She who Flies".

One day, "She who Flies" has an accident that damages her wings, and she sits, wounded, on the forest floor. The other animals gather around her, encouraging her to flap her wings and fly. No matter how hard she tries, her wings will not lift her off the ground. All she can do is whimper in pain.

Day and night she sits on the forest floor, partially covered in leaves, and whimpers. The forest animals regularly visit and encourage her. Still her wings do not heal.

She continues to whimper and feel sorry for herself, sure that her life is no longer of any value. But as she grows stronger, her whimpering becomes louder and her song becomes sweeter.

Soon the other forest animals gather around her, not to sympathize with her, but to listen to her beautiful birdsong. And while her wings never heal properly, and she never flies again, the forest creatures celebrate her, and she becomes known as “She who Sings”.

Sometimes, healing is like that. It’s not necessarily what we think we want, not what we anticipate, or ask for, but somehow, there is healing, somehow there is peace. Maybe not right away, maybe not for several months or even years. Sometimes, healing comes through death.

That doesn’t mean that God is not present, that our prayers aren’t being heard, that we and our concerns are irrelevant in the grand scheme of things. This is flawed thinking and I believe, flawed interpretation of our scriptures.

We shouldn’t assume, from scriptures such as these, that falling on our knees in prayer will result in miraculous healings, or that you have to risk everything to be seen worthy.

Rather, what we should take from these stories of Jesus, is that no matter who you are, leader or outcast; no matter what life has dealt you, ease or struggle; no matter how society views you, honoured or ignored; in the eyes of God you are loved, your life is valued, you are worthy of grace, and you are part of the community of God.

May this revelation bring us to our knees, in gratitude and praise for the one who knows us fully and loves us anyway, offering us always, God's amazing grace! Amen