

This is one of my favourite gospel passages – this and the story of the Widow of Nain’s Son; both of them are accounts of Jesus raising the dead. There are a couple of reasons why I find them particularly resonant. In the account of raising the widow of Nain’s son from the dead, it is the only recorded miracle that Jesus works without being asked; he raises the widow’s son simply because he feels pity for her. The Greek word used for this is *splagchnizomai*, and it means ‘to have pity, to feel sympathy.’ It derives from the word *splagchnon*, meaning ‘inward parts, entrails.’ In other words, Jesus felt pity for the widow deep in his guts. Today we would say: ‘his heart was moved with pity.’ It’s more elegant, but less accurate.

I find the gospel reading today particularly moving, because there is a wonderful little miracle spliced in between two segments of the story of Jairus’ daughter; it’s there almost as an afterthought, a footnote, but it is full of telling detail. It is the cure of the woman with a haemorrhage. Once again, Jesus is not asked to work this miracle – the woman tries to cure herself, using Jesus as a source of power; she says to herself: ‘All I need to do is touch the hem of his garment, and I will be made well.’ Why doesn’t she ask Jesus? Everybody else does. She doesn’t ask him because of the nature of her affliction: it is an irregular discharge of menstrual blood. In those times and in that society, a woman was considered unclean

during her time of menstruation and she could not go about her daily business until it was over and she had been ritually purified. So this illness was shameful to the woman – she was not just embarrassed, she was ashamed and; she also knew that if the crowd realized what was wrong with her, they would have sent her away. These are the reasons why the woman did not ask Jesus directly for help.

Sometimes, that's how it is with us: we have some unhappy wound inside us, some emotional or psychological haemorrhage that causes us private shame, or an unshared regret, or a moral wound that we don't even share with God. Those are the very times that we need to touch the hem of Christ's garment – and that's all we need to do. To believe in his power, as the woman did, and to stretch out our hand and touch his cloak. The woman in today's gospel was able to do this literally because she lived at the same time as Jesus; we don't have that privilege, but there are other ways to touch the hem of his garment. It could be a heartfelt prayer – a personal, private prayer offered up before we sleep or before we wake; or a wordless gesture – gestures involve the whole person, including the body and, as sign language for the Deaf teaches us, it can be a very intense and poignant thing; or a short period of silence – silence, which everybody tries to avoid and everybody desperately needs; or, best of all, it could

be a gentle act of goodness – because, however small or modest, acts of goodness involve others and they are anchored in love, whether we feel it or not.

We do not have to wonder or worry whether our prayer or gesture or silence or act of goodness has been received; Christ will feel power going out of him; he will know he has been touched and he will know who touched him. And he will say to us as he did to the woman: ‘Go in peace.’