

Talitha cumi! Stand up, little maid!¹

With this simple direction, a 12 year old girl, all but invisible to her community, now dead, was told to stand up and take her place with the living. Having journeyed with her father, Jesus did what was not only amazing, but totally improbable. He restored to life a young girl on the cusp of womanhood back to her place in the household. In response to her father's desperation, and despite the negative greeting on arrival by the professional mourners Jesus gives the gift of life.

I will admit, coming into looking at this reading, I have been wrestling, delving into it and exploring all sorts of things in relation as to what is in this gospel, and to be honest: call it a writer's block, lack of inspiration, or being simply overwhelmed, words will not come. This is one of the most amazing passages that continues to confront me on so many levels. Because of this, I needed to stand back and simply ask myself, "What is going on?"

I've walked and sat around tranquil lakes and reflected, meditated, practised mindfulness. I have wrestled with issues of staying with my peer support group and things that are going on for others that I am involved with, and I have found no conflict or pressure. It comes back to the nature of the passage.

Now, I can very easily undertake an exegesis on the passage. Exegesis is the process of *pulling out*: *ex* meaning out of; *gesis*: leading thoughts: so, looking at the train of thought going through the passage. I could wow you with the fact it is another chiasm, a literary device that starts in one place, journeys to a different, and returns to the first thought. In the pew bulletin, I've done a bit of that: I place where it occurs in the narrative. Jesus has been where no Jew should be, destroyed a few pigs and frightened the locals before returning back to his 'own' folk. That, in itself, is part of a larger chiasm as the crossing of the sea becomes a metaphor, to use another bit of jargon, of the gospel being proclaimed to all people.

Then there is the level of fright, acceptance and resistance at work in the narrative. The gentiles are scared witless by Jesus confronting evil. Then, there are those who are beginning to see the simple truth of God's presence, only to be confronted by the organised religious zealots, possibly also scared witless, challenging the authority of Jesus lest they lose their own. It is complicated. It is involved. It is the making of a good movie plot, counterplot and a hero. But in this interlude, something is there that is simply different.

I came to the conclusion that why I find it hard to put something into words here is a simple reality that I need to confront in myself. I am overcome by awe. I am awestruck by this relating of the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the healing of the woman with the haemorrhage, and that, in-itself, is what I need ask of myself, "why?"

On Friday, in Kyneton, at the Kyneton Community Cares Op Shop, I encountered an interesting Scot who, on seeing my collar, bailed me up immediately. He promptly took the opportunity to give testimony to what he believes. "I am an atheist. And I'll tell you why." I took a silent, and hopefully not too obvious deep breath. "My fault," I thought. I chose to wear a collar as I was going out on a funeral callout later. Wear the uniform: wear the attention.

I responded, "I'm glad you believe something!" It's a good thing to say to an atheist. Their dogged insistence that they have no faith or believe not in God is actually a belief. Don't feel at a loss for words – challenge away! Being a Scot, he was up for the challenge. "I'll tell you why. Do you believe in faeries?" At this point, my wicked mind wants to take over and respond with "Listen, pet, of course I believe in faeries. Some of my best friends..." but I just tilted my head on one side and engaged his eyes to show that I heard and want him to continue.

"Well", he continued, faeries can do magical things like changing people into things, even bringing them back to life. I went to the local Kirk every Sunday morning, afternoon and evening in Scotland, and they kept telling me that Jesus was the first raised from the dead. This is nonsense! How about Lazarus? If they can't be truthful with their own book, why should I believe in the story of one raised from the dead?"

¹ ἀνάστασις [τῶν] νεκρῶν. Stand up from the dead

At this point, I was internally screaming about saying “Well, Jairus daughter was raised before him” but that would not send the argument anywhere. Exploring other examples, like Zarephath’s son being restored by Elijah to look after his widowed mother;² Elisha raising Shunamite’s son after he suffered a brain haemorrhage;³ people burying a body in the same tomb of Elisha threw the body on Elisha’s bones only to have the Holy Spirit bring the man’s body back to life;⁴ and the widow of Nain’s son raised and restored to his mother by Jesus⁵ would only possibly confuse the Scot further. And then, the awe of Jairus’ daughter and the unclean woman hit again.

The Scot must have noticed that my demeanour had changed. He took a step back, and stared at me. “Go well, Dennis” he said. He then added, “Enjoy our town’s Scottish summer. It’s glorious.” Once more, into the foggy and rather bleak cold I went with Wendy and Jim.

What caught me up was the pattern of resurrection all involved women at one point of another. The widow’s sons raised to protect their mothers. The woman of Shunem was given a son as a thanksgiving of hospitality towards Elisha. He was the result of prayers, and it took away the shame of no children. The loss of that child later was another major blow to the family. Elisha restored the child to the mother, keeping the family legacy alive.

And that is the moment of awe in the gospel for today. It is about legacy, but a different type. In all reality, a young girl on the cusp of womanhood, and a woman who is ritually unclean and socially isolated had no place in the community. The young girl would be part of the goods and chattels normally traded for a good wedding to another prominent or emerging family. The position of the father was important, yet, there was something more happening.

The woman who had bled and bled and was unable to be part of the community, was all but invisible. They were nothing. They were part of the everyday invisibles that make up the wider community in which we live. We would normally walk past them, and whilst our peripheral vision may encounter them, we would scarcely register their existence.

Jairus, the enlightened leader, threw himself at the feet of Jesus, pleading for wholeness for the daughter he loved. To throw himself at the feet of an itinerant teacher in front of the crowd was to place himself in the realms of ridicule. In response to that love of the father, Jesus went with him. It didn’t matter if it were a son or a daughter, or what the consequences of the spectacle would be: flesh of my flesh, my daughter is ill.

On the way, another threw themselves at the feet of Jesus. This time, an invisible woman reached out in faith, wanting healing, wholeness and restoration. Her plea was in prayer, not spectacle. Jesus sought her out, and affirmed her faith, and made her stand up in the presence of the people. He restored her fully into the community. He then arrived at the house of Jairus, and was met by the professional mourners. They scoffed, but he said to the little girl, *Talitha cumi!*, little maid, stand up. The girl stood up from the dead.

The awe for me is not the healing, not the feminist agenda, but I do marvel at the implication. It is in the *standing up* from the dead. In standing up, people are placed back into their place in community. The invisible are restored: flesh of my flesh are made whole. Love conquers and speaks, even from the grave. Noel Coward may well have penned the words *What is this thing called love?* in 1929, but this thing called love is being shown as being eternal. Death cannot hold it. Mourning underlines it. Restoration and wholeness exemplify it.

Love stands out in life as well as from the grave. In the simple command *cumi*, arise, God allows it to stand strongly before all of us.

² I Ki 17:17-24

³ 2Ki 4:20-37

⁴ 2 Ki 13:21

⁵ Lk 7:11-16

There are so many invisible people in our community who are longing and wanting of love. There are so many people who are invisible in their hurting and distress who are just waiting for someone to listen and hear them. There are so many prayers that are being offered for restoration and acceptance that all it takes is a simple glance, a simple gesture: a hand up, not a hand out and people are restored to wholeness.

Not all of us will be ever gifted the power to raise people from the dead. Not all of us will be in the position of throwing ourselves before the feet of Jesus, or the greats like Elijah, Elisha, or even Peter, who said to Dorcas, *tabitha cumi*. Arise, beautiful gazelle.⁶ No, there is something more awesome being told to us here.

The restoration of people to wholeness is key, no matter who they are. That hand up and the command “*cumi*”, arise, is the key.

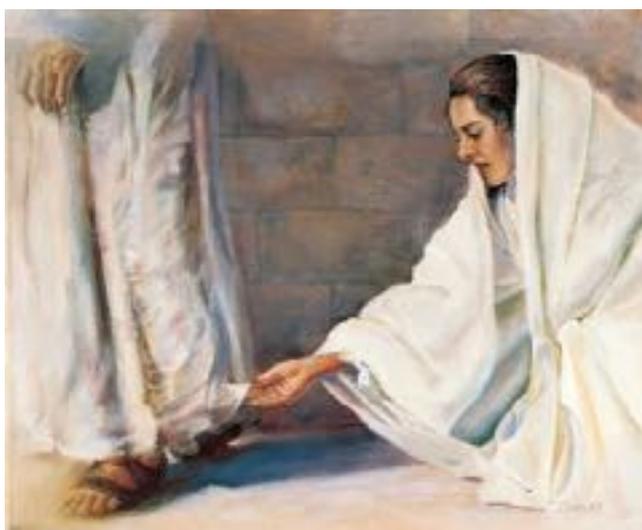
It is through our own acts of love, or even the old word for this, charity, that matters. We reach out and enable others to begin to journey back into wholeness, no matter who they are, and what is their journey. It is about restoration to being able to become *the person whom God created in their mother's womb, and called by name*.⁷ It is about doing what we can, with a simple act of love and kindness and allowing people to begin again.

Today's gospel exemplifies the love of God: through life and death, hardship and success, beyond the barriers of gender and status, not discriminating by our standards, but loving, wholly and unconditionally what God has made and called *good*.⁸

My people, arise, says the Lord, offering to us his hand. Get up off your feet. Your prayers are being heard. Stand up from the dead. Begin again. Be the person whom I created.

The illustration on today's pew bulletin loses something in the black and white, so I invite you to look at some stage at the colour version. You will see something incredible about the woman. The artist has drawn her as a ghost. As she touches the hem of Jesus garment, you will see that her colour is being restored to her hand. Her prayers, not articulated vocally, but manifest in her actions, begins the journey to wholeness the moment she reaches out to the body of Christ.

My friends, Paul reminds us that *we are the body of Christ*. How many other invisibles, be they girls, boys, women or men, marginalised, poor, rich or powerful, refugees and asylum seekers, afflicted by substance abuse and illness, sexually and gender diverse, blind, deaf, poor, indebted, lepers of what ever type of scourge you could imagine, reach out to us seeking wholeness?



⁶ Acts 9:36-41

⁷ Psalm 139

⁸ Genesis 1

How awesome it would it be for them if we could, just for a fleeting moment reach out to them and offer a hand up and say, *arise to newness of life?*

This month, we will journey in the bible with many examples of the marginalised restored. Some of us are indeed those reaching out. As that *body of Christ*, can we overcome our fear and return the hand of God's creation back to them as they reach out to us: gladly, lovingly, and unconditionally?