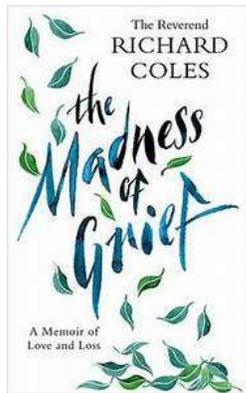


SERMON – 24 JUNE 2021 – 2 Corinthians 8.7-end, Mark 5.21-end

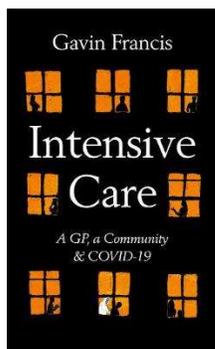
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A gospel reading which really tells a story – with ordinary people, and we can imagine what they are going through. A great crowd beside the lake, and Jairus, the leader of the synagogue pushing his way through to talk to Jesus. We don't know if his daughter had been ill for a while, or if she had suddenly been struck down – but whatever it is, he needs Jesus. This is a man of faith, a man of status – in a sense, the local Vicar – and he needs help. Imagine what his relationship might have been with Jesus – we don't know which synagogue Jairus was in charge of, but perhaps it was somewhere Jesus had regularly worshipped in his thirty odd years. Perhaps Jairus and Jesus knew each other well, and it was perfectly natural that Jairus asked for help – or it could have taken a huge amount for Jairus to go to Jesus, perhaps he was suspicious of him and his teaching, but he was so desperate, he'd try anything. To me it sounds a more sensible relationship – I recognise you are a man of God, a holy man, and I need your help – please.

Even today, when the daughter – how sad she isn't named – even today, when the daughter would be in Paediatric Intensive Care, with a team of medics doing their very best – even today, the holy man, or woman, is usually very welcome. I will never forget the support we had from chaplains at West Suffolk, Addenbrooke's, Guy's, Great Ormond Street, and the Freeman in Newcastle. I know that chaplains are usually welcomed by everyone – not just those with a church background, but a good chaplain will be a welcome member of the team, valued by staff, patients and families alike. I remember one hospital chaplain saying he was probably the only person in a hospital who could walk into see the Chief Executive, and be welcomed in the boiler room. He wasn't particularly boasting, just amazed at the openings he had. He also said that he knew he was accepted when he arrived in the Chapel one morning just before Christmas to find that his Christmas tree had been stolen, and was being held to ransom by the hospital porters. "If they are comfortable enough to do that," he said, "I know they'll call on me when they need me." I think it cost him a round of drinks to get his tree back – and he happily paid it. A good chaplaincy department will work across the Christian denominations, it will work multi-faith (bringing together Jews, Christians, Muslims, the lot), and it will support those of no faith who just need someone to talk to. A good chaplaincy department is worth its weight in gold.



One of the books I read while on holiday reminded me of the cost of being a holy man. I read Richard Coles, *The Madness of Grief*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2021, about the death of his partner David, also a priest, just before Christmas 2019. In many ways it is too close to home – I too know the delight of an Intensive Care Unit at Christmas, the struggle of what he calls the “sadmin”, all the paperwork that has to be done after death, and the way grief overwhelms. He writes about being a public figure, of trying to be positive, of living his faith while in public, even when he is only just hanging on by his finger tips. He finds a comfort in shared experience, and a smile at wisdom. One of the comments he makes is when he has been fighting with the hospital parking regime – page 36 “As a general rule, try not to be impatient with people in hospital car parks. They may be having the worst day of their lives.” Good advice.



In the Orcadian bookshop I purchased Gavin Francis, *Intensive care; a GP, a community and Covid19*, Profile Books, 2021. An academic, a GP in Edinburgh (and some time spent locumming on Orkney), it is an overview of January to October last year. Herd immunity, the lack of PPE, discharge into nursing homes – all the failures we know about – and the incredible care that has been given. He has an area of Edinburgh full of the homeless, the people for whom English is not their first language, he writes about the mental consequences of lockdown. I read the book, angry at so much (though well aware that I have the benefit of hindsight), amazed at the work that was done, and a bit guilty that my Covid year was so much easier than his. It has challenged me as to how I will use the energy I have, how we should use the wealth, power and influence we

have, to work for a more just and caring world. Is it enough just to give generously to the foodbank month by month, or should we be more involved in the political arena, pushing to rebuild a fairer, more just, Society. What does it mean to have faith, to be holy men and women in today's world.

Going back to the gospel, someone else needs the Holy Man as well. A woman with an issue of blood. Not a subject we talk about in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not a subject talked about in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Certainly not in a society and a religion with ideas of uncleanness – physically unpleasant, physically draining (even us men can imagine how she felt), socially and religiously taboo – pushed away, unwelcome, unclean. Doctors have done nothing for her, they can do nothing, perhaps they've just made it worse – we can imagine what she's been through. She has heard about Jesus, "if I just touch his cloak, I will be made well" – after all, she's not going to stop him in front of everyone, tell him what's wrong, and ask for his healing, that would be too much. All I need is that touch – she's convinced herself, and somehow she knows, she is healed.

Just imagine, that relief, that amazement – and then she's called to account. "Who touched my clothes?" says Jesus. You can imagine a rather harassed disciple saying "everyone's touching you" – and perhaps the woman wondered if she could get away. But no, she comes, in fear and trembling – after all, if she's unclean, will he feel she took advantage of him, will he be angry, will be disgusted – after all, single man in his early 30s, probably doesn't have a lot of experience of what she's gone through, and might not have any sympathy. in front of a large crowd.

"Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your disease." You can imagine the relief – but there's no time for more. "Some people came from the leader's house to say Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" I hope they said it more tactfully than that – but perhaps they didn't need to say anything – as soon as Jairus say his servant coming towards him, he knew the worst had happened. "Do not fear, only believe" – and Jairus had no real option, but to let Jesus come too. Jesus took control – Jairus was in no fit state to do so. Knocked absolutely sideways – this reading is a bit too close to home.

"The child is not dead, but sleeping" – no wonder they laughed at Jesus. They know what dead is, and this child is dead. Somehow, and no, I don't know how, Jesus raises the child from the dead. I have to accept that he is God, he can do miraculous things, and I will believe – though part of me wonders why my children could not be healed, not be raised – life is not fair.

I am sure I have told you the story that when was in the Cathedral, James the Dean used to disappear two or three times a year to lead pilgrimages to the Holy Land. He would return, and for the next few weeks his sermons would all start “When I was in the Holy Land ...”. One story I will never forget. He said he was on a bus, and there was a mum and her daughter sat in front of him. As the bus slowed for a bus stop, mum turned to daughter and said “Talitha Cum” – little girl, get up. I love that, a biblical story coming alive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our faith is the faith of a God who interacts with people. All these personal stories, individual interactions, women, men, leaders of churches, faces in the crowd, people with ill health, grieving families – all these different people need God’s love, all these different people interact with God, whether they know it or not. Our job is to be part of all that, to celebrate all that, to help facilitate some of it, to encourage, to hallow – to rejoice that God is at work. It is our job, our privilege – our duty and our joy. Amen.