

Continuity of care : following the example of Christ

Mark 5 v21-43

Introduction

Challenged by this theme of continuity of care we asked ourselves about the example of Christ in his role as carer. What image do we have of Jesus if we think of him looking after the sick: that of an outstanding miracle worker with multiple examples of cure with no complications, or that of the Great Doctor interested in the whole person, body, mind and spirit? Were his actions totally outside the context and laws of his time or did He act within the scope of regional norms and the circumstances in which individuals found themselves. The text from the gospel of Mark telling of two very different healings offers us different perspectives.

Mark, chapter 5, verses 21 to 43:

(21) When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake.

(22) Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. (23) He pleaded earnestly with him, 'My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.' (24) So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him.

(25) And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. (26) She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. (27) When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, (28) because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' (29) Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. (30) At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' (31) 'You see the people crowding against you,' his disciples answered, 'and yet you can ask, "Who touched me?"' (32) But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. (33) Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. (34) He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.'

(35) While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. 'Your daughter is dead,' they said. 'Why bother the teacher anymore?' (36) Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, 'Don't be afraid; just believe.' (37) He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. (38) When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. (39) He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.' (40) but they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. (41) He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha koumi!' (which means 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!') (42) Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. (43) He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The interruption, a digression.

Victim of his own success, Jesus is pressed upon from all sides. Nonetheless, a local notable comes to consult him, 'comme il faut', obeying the rules, with a formal request. It is almost as if a doctor's appointment takes place, even though it is about a particularly urgent matter; a 12-year-old girl is dying. It is also 12 years ago that a woman started suffering from a chronic illness with burdensome consequences, not only physical but also social and religious: *When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period* (Leviticus 15, 25). Until now, consulting others had achieved nothing and had cost her a lot but now the miracle happens: she touches Jesus' robe and, as it were, in spite of Him, she is cured. Jesus is aware of what is happening, very probably on a level far beyond the way the incident is recorded for us, and he stops to focus on the situation, perhaps also to ensure that we would be told about it.

This reminds us of our clinical consultations where, sometimes in a way that is unconscious and involuntary, a smile, an approach, an intuition or more consciously the Toupet-Semont manoeuvre to relieve the vertigo of BPPV (benign paroxysmal positional vertigo), an opportune surgical intervention, an effective painkiller, have been able to unblock situations which seemed unsolvable or stuck. It can just as well happen during a period of care lasting a long time or during a single consultation (emergency, appointment with a specialist...). That instant, fleeting encounter between two individuals, even if they have known each other a long time, can be liberating with effects on the whole of the subsequent patient journey.

Admittedly Christ's *modus operandi*, with His miraculous healings, differs from our usual patterns of care. Still, take note, that in this healing, Jesus didn't insist on knowing all the patient's history, didn't need to get hold of old notes of previous consultations, didn't need to talk to the numerous previous therapists, didn't need to make a first appointment to open a casefile before starting a treatment. Shouldn't we sometimes, in His image, allow ourselves to be diverted from our routine way of doing things?

Equally, Christ did not adhere to the established laws. In the same way as in our text, he had contact with people who were impure and on occasions even touched them voluntarily (for example, the leper in Mark 1, 41 *Jesus was filled with compassion. He reached out his hand and touched the man.*) Elsewhere he forgave sins (Mark 2, 9-11 *Which is easier: to say to this paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?' But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.'*) He healed people on the Sabbath (Mark 3, 4 *Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is*

lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?') He took care of the heathen (Mark 7, 27, the text of 10th August 2024). He gives pause to our rigidity, our narrow preconceptions and thus affirms God's Love and Sovereignty.

Continuity of care, respect for our humanity

That redeeming interlude slowed the Master's walk and seems to have brought with it devastating consequences. 'Too late.' The situation has been turned upside down: the unexpected has wreaked havoc on what was planned, and what was scheduled became an unwelcome interruption. He could have given up, but he encourages, and he motivates. The walk continues, but with fewer numbers, in greater intimacy, to encounter another crowd already in a frenzy of mourning. Again, should he have given up? But he persists and questions, almost naively, dispassionately, gently, at risk of being jeered at. In private, no magic formula, but a simple prescription for action, 'Get up'. In that healing, he involves the parents, recommends further care, gives a prescription for food. In the same way as for the victim in the parable of the Good Samaritan the consultation continues with the essential provision of nourishment.

Jesus performed miracles but didn't subsequently abandon the person who had been healed, providing a care package adapted to each situation. In the same way as in our text, on several occasions he involved others who were present. Elsewhere he told the person to follow the religious regulations (Mark 1, 44 *Go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.*) He surrounded himself with a whole team of assistants (Mark 3, 13b-15 *Jesus... called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with Him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons* and Mark 6, 13 *They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.*) To those in need he came to offer them a helping hand (Mark 9,18b *'I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.'*). Empowered by His Teachings, they were then sent off to do His work (Mark 16, 15-18).

Through Jesus Christ, God irrupts into our humanity and out of respect for who and where we are, he embraces our habits and customs, even if sometimes he takes pleasure in totally bending the rules.

Continuity of care, a path.

Christ's actions which healed and liberated many people could seem a one-off, but without doubt these encounters turned their lives upside down. In each example of care, the involvement of the person or of those around them comes first. When reading the Chouraqui version of our passage, we were struck by the translation of the terms 'faith' (verse 34) and 'believe' (v 36) by 'adherence' and 'adhere'. How could we not think, as good modern therapists – of the concept of 'therapeutic adherence', even if the French prefer the term 'therapeutic adhesion' to the anglicised version. Shouldn't continuity of care start with the patient themselves?

On our journeys as carers, often too busy, where continuity of care is not always evident, we try to accompany our patients on their life journey. In Christ, God on earth physically encountered a certain number of people; some, who were obviously ill, were healed, others, seemingly well, didn't need healing, but he offered to accompany everyone on their journey, and he breathed into everyone the desire to adhere, to 'stick' to the Way (John 14, 6a *Jesus answered 'I am the way and the truth and the life.'*). God gave us this invitation long ago; *'Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.'* (Deuteronomy 30, 19b-20a).

*** All English bible quotations in italics taken from the New International Version (NIV).*

References

- ¹. Kaufmann, F. La Bible Chouraqui : genèse d'une traduction et de ses retraductions au regard des archives. <https://journals.openedition.org/coma/10913> (2023) doi:10.4000/COMA.10913. Point n° 59.
- ². "adhésion thérapeutique" in "Grand dictionnaire terminologique", Office québécois de la langue française. <https://vitrinelinguistique.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/fiche-gdt/fiche/8349662/adhesion-therapeutique>. consulté le 29.03.2024.