

One of the duties and privileges of being a parish pastor is visiting the sick and homebound, whether in their home, in a hospital, or in a care center. And when making such visits, I feel that I am temporarily a small, but significant, part of the overall health care team for the individual involved, because I believe that health and healing encompass all facets of a person---physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. The medical professionals involved are supplying the best of their health expertise to contribute to healing—and thanks be to God for that! But receiving Holy Communion, hearing a word of Scripture, and being lifted up in prayer *also* contribute to healing. Health involves more than just the body. This is a conviction that Jesus acts on all the time throughout the gospels. He sees every person as being one whole package of a person in need of healing that may involve body, mind, heart *and* soul. Which is why we speak of healing in this way every month when we have our healing service, as we will this morning; we recognize that a person is more than just their physical health or just their emotional, mental or spiritual health, but *one whole person*. I always find it moving to be a part of such prayer time for people, knowing that we are carrying on a tradition of Christ and his disciples.

Now, when I visit people who are struggling with some facet of their health, I naturally hear about some of their struggles with the whole health system and healing process. The complaint I hear most often is that those in the health professions don't *listen* to them, don't recognize the particular uniqueness of their health quandary, and are not receptive to tailoring their approach to the individual situation of the one involved. I get that. I know that when I had surgery on my broken wrist a year and a half ago, I asked the anesthetist if a different approach than general anesthesia might be appropriate, as I didn't always react well to general anesthesia. I felt brushed off by an abrupt response that general anesthesia was the standard approach in such a surgery, and since my previous reactions hadn't been severe, it was the way to go. So we did go that route, and sure enough, I spent half a day of nausea, vertigo, and misery upon awakening from the general anesthesia. This wasn't a big deal in the big picture of my life and health, but it gave me the unhappy feeling of not being heard and understood as an *individual* within a large health system. And let me just add, that the reason this stood out so blatantly for me was that I have had both Dr. Deb Allert and Dr. Anne Skadberg as my physicians

through the years, and both of these good physicians within our congregation *always* treat me and everyone as an individual and recognize the multiple dimensions of one's health. They are the shining example against which other lesser examples might be measured. That said, most of us relate to the feeling I've been describing of wanting healing to be wholistic and tailored to our individual and specific situation and needs. We *know* we're not the first or the last person with whatever ailment we have, but we *also* know that our situation is probably still somewhat unique, and we want that recognized. Jesus, as we will see in our text today, is the ultimate shining example of the Good Physician in this regard.

The Gospel of Mark as we are moving through it has so far been marked by a sense of urgency and brevity. A lot has already happened even though we're just in chapter 5. Which means these two healings in our text this morning are already part of a series of healings that demonstrates a wholistic approach. Several weeks ago we had the healing of the paralyzed young man, the one who was lowered from a hole dug in the roof by his friends who were determined to place him before Jesus for healing. Jesus first declared the forgiveness of the young man's sins and then told him to get up and walk---which he did. So it was a healing that encompassed spiritual and physical facets, both forgiveness and mobility. Then last week we had the healing-slash-exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac, where Jesus commands the demons to leave this miserable, likely mentally ill individual; the demons go into a nearby herd of pigs, who run off a cliff and drown, as you recall. But *that* healing took into account issues of alienation, of mental illness, and of God's constant battle against evil in whatever form it takes and however we might understand that. Again, a wholistic approach. And now in this text, we have two healings that share some similarities but are also quite different from one another: one involves a young girl, one involves an old woman. One healing is accomplished very intentionally by Jesus, the other happens almost by stealth on the part of the one healed. There's nothing conventional about either the one's needing healing or in Christ's approach to them; the healing involves the whole person in each case and also impacts others. Furthermore, each healing is only possible because the primary people involved are willing to leave their comfort zones and act unconventionally, as does Jesus. Let's look more closely.

The first story involves Jairus, a synagogue leader. His young daughter, 12 years old we later learn, is near death. He is out-of-his mind crazy with fear and grief, and understandably so. We want to recognize that Jairus should not be seeking Jesus' help. Jairus is the leader of the synagogue. Jesus has been roundly condemned by all the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests, and so on. He is regarded as a dangerous, radical, loose cannon who should be avoided and preferably, stopped. By all reasonable standards, Jairus should not have gone to Jesus for help, nor should he have faith that Jesus could help him. And yet faith he does have. He claws his way through the crowd surrounding Jesus, falls at his feet, abandoning all pretense of pride or respectability, and begs him, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." He believes Jesus can heal his daughter.

With typical compassion, Jesus agrees to go and help, and he is on a mission of considerable urgency, we might think---but then there is a significant interruption. They are on their way to Jairus' home, when we read, "Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had and she was not better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak for she said to herself, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be made well." Obviously, Jesus' life was full of unexpected interruptions from desperate people. And this woman, like Jairus, had to be desperate, because she was also way out of her comfort zone. She shouldn't be doing what she does. She is considered unclean because of that blood flow; she should not be out among others. What's more, regardless of her unclean status, a 1st C. Jewish woman simply did not approach a Jewish man whom she didn't know. Certainly she wouldn't be grabbing at his cloak without asking. It's like she's on a stealth mission to touch Christ's cloak and then disappear again into the crowd, unnoticed. And like Jairus, she for some reason also has faith in Jesus. She tells herself, "If only I touch his cloak, I will be made well." After all the failed treatments she's had, why ever should she believe that simply touching the cloak of this radical preacher should bring her healing? But there it is, she does believe it, and Jesus tells her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well." And she's healed. And Jesus does more than heal her body; He

heals her soul when He leaves her with this profound benediction: “Go in peace.” He blesses her with peace, with shalom, the completeness of God’s presence about her.

Which is all well and good, except what’s Jairus thinking and feeling at this point? Precious minutes are being lost here. He must have been in agony, and then the worst happens---word reaches him that his daughter has now died, and there is no point in troubling Jesus to come. Jesus tells Jairus, “Do not be afraid, only believe”. And somehow Jairus keeps the faith, and they continue on to his home. Rituals of mourning have already begun---friends and family have gathered and are loudly wailing and lamenting together. Jesus tells them their presence isn’t necessary, because the girl is not dead, only sleeping. Of course, they laugh at him, and so would we. But he sends the crowd out, takes the girl by the hand, and he speaks to her in Aramaic, saying “talitha cumi”, which means, “little girl, arise”. One commentary suggested that in a Scots dialect those words could be translated, “My wee lass, get up!”, and we hear in that version the personal and endearing touch which Jesus intended. We might ask ourselves, “which of us could be touched by Jesus and appealed to so affectionately, and remain as we were?” and the answer would be, not one of us. Neither did she. The little girl gets up, and word spreads of this miracle. And Jesus tends not only to her revival in her healing, but to a broader, practical need: “Give her something to eat”, he tells the family, all of whom are impacted by this miraculous healing.

What can we say about both of these miracles? Both involve courage to step outside of one’s comfort zone and act unconventionally—on the part of the woman healed on her own behalf, on the part of Jairus, for his daughter’s behalf. Both involve faith, the belief that God’s intervention makes a difference. Both healings are tailored to the situation involved and cater to the needs of each individual as a whole person. And this is a pattern that will continue throughout all of the healings we will see in the Gospels.

Our text, then is full of miracles. Literal miracles, like the raising of Jairus’ daughter and the healing of the women with the hemorrhage. And miracles almost no less literal, like the willingness of Jairus and the woman to seek out Jesus against all odds. Like the courage and faith they display in the midst of their

circumstances. And like their surprising faith that Jesus could, in fact, help them. Where God is present, miracles abound! And today, like most days, is a good day to be reminded of that!

What do we learn about Jesus in this text, apart from his obvious ability to work miracles and to heal? We learn that he sees and cares for those who society discards.....a young girl already or nearly dead.....an old woman, unclean from years of chronic hemorrhage....these were not important people within their world, indeed they were near the bottom rung of society's ladder. But Jesus sees them as individuals, understands their story, and cares for them. Do we do the same for those our society would write off or discard?

We also learn that Jesus works with interruptions. He is open to having his original agenda altered to respond to the Spirit's direction in the immediacy of the moment. I think that's hard to do. He recognizes that what we regard as unwelcome interruptions may actually be God calling us to respond. Can we model that same kind of willingness and flexibility in the midst of our sometimes self-important busy-ness?

Touch and individuality are at play here, also. In each of these instances, Jesus heals with a touch. That isn't always the case; as we've said, each healing miracle within the Gospel is unique. There is no cookie cutter formula for healing; Jesus *always* responds individually to the need of the one *in* need. Two lessons here for us, perhaps---the importance of touching others---respectful and appropriate touching, of course!---but the importance of touch for those who may be suffering or grieving, or those who don't receive much physical affection---nursing home residents, for example? And also the importance of not trying to reduce the problems of the world's troubled people into systematic categories with one-size-fits-all solutions; recognizing instead the individuality of the problem or need right in front of us, and bringing compassion to bear to *that* situation, as Jesus does.

There is good news for us this morning in this Word of God. It seems clear that God has a heart for people who are broken, suffering, or in desperate situations. There is room in the kingdom of God for people who are lost and hurting. People who are struggling with depression. People who are ill in body or mind. People who are too fearful to share or to trust. Broken people. Limited people. Sinful people. People like us. We are here this morning because we recognize our need for the renewing touch of Jesus, for a word that calls

us to arise. We recognize our need for a word that offers forgiveness and shalom, or peace. All of this we find in the hearing of God's Word and in the sacrament of the Lord's supper which we will shortly share. We know we need healing. And we know who to turn to for those things. Because compassion is the hallmark of Jesus' personality. That compassion extends even to us; and then it extends through us, to others. Amen.