

## God's Healing Power

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

First Reading: 2 Sam. (1:1, 17-27) Psalm Reading: (130)

NT: 2 Cor (8:7-15), Mark (5:21-43)

In our reading from Mark, Jesus is all about healing. The story begins with a large crowd pressing around Jesus as he comes off a boat. (NIV, Mark 5:21) And well they might. They see Jesus as a mystic. He is a rabbi, a teacher. He has a magnetic personality. Is this why they follow him? for the show, for the wisdom? Are they simply attracted to his charisma, or do they follow him because of his healing power?

Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, may have many reasons for coming to see Jesus, but one thing is for certain, he has a pressing need for healing, not healing for himself. No, this is even more important. It is for his daughter. (v. 23) He falls at the feet of Jesus (v. 22) and "pleads earnestly" saying, "My little daughter is dying." You can feel the anguish of this man. You can feel the concern come up through the pages. Being a father, I can feel my heart wrench at his plea. He begs, "Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." (v.23)

And this is what sickness, illness, and danger can do to us. It can make us despair. It can make us desperate. It can reduce our humanity to a bundle of desire, a desire for resolution, and desire for an escape. Not an escape so much from the pain, perhaps, but an escape from the anxiety that plagues our minds, our hearts, and our souls. Jairus is anxious for his daughter and his plea, his prayer, directly to Jesus, is moving.

He asks that Jesus come with him. And when we hurt, we also make this plea that Jesus be with us. We know that the Christ is always present, but because we are flawed humans we do not always feel that presence. When we ask for and seek that presence, that is when it becomes more apparent to us.

The Bible tells us, almost as a matter of course, “Jesus went with him.” (v. 24) The crowd follows along, it presses in and around Jesus as he walks. It just so happens that there is a woman in the crowd who is suffering from bleeding, and has been suffering for twelve years. Now, you need to understand that this is not just a medical problem. In ancient Israel, a flow of blood was also a social problem for the woman. It was not that people thought that this ailment was contagious, but it was a rule that contact with a woman with a flow of blood would make a person ritually unclean. Which meant an extensive and lengthy cleansing process.<sup>1</sup> People who were concerned about such matters would shun the woman. So not only was she afflicted physically, but also socially. Doctors, with the primitive practices of the time, were unable to heal her. (v. 26)

The presence of Jesus must have seemed to her like a good opportunity to be rid of all her problems at once. The woman thinks, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” (v. 28) As quick as she thinks it, so she acts, and immediately is relieved of her suffering. (v. 29) Imagine the mental relief! She has been dealing with this problem for twelve years. Now, she is suddenly unafflicted. But before she can retreat from the crowd with her healed body, she has a new problem.

Jesus spins about. I can just see his robes flowing around him. He asks, “Who touched my clothes!?” (v. 30) Now, this is an interesting question. Does Jesus know who is reaching out to him? I think he does know, and this question and his looking into the crowd are his way of bringing the woman forward, his way of bringing her to him. And she does come forth. Trembling with fear, she tells him “the whole truth.” (v. 33)

Having identified the woman and brought her out, Jesus tells her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you.” (v. 34) Yes, she has touched Jesus’ robe, but we find out that it is not the touching of the robe that heals her. It is her faith that heals her. We know that we are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. And there is a connection between saving and healing. In fact, the root of the Greek word used in this passage for healing is *σῶζω* (sozo), which typically does mean “saved”.<sup>2</sup> In fact, there are several versions of the Bible that specifically translate this passage to indicate that the woman has been “saved”.<sup>3</sup>

Notice that Jesus calls her “daughter”. This is an interesting development as it implies familial relationship. Jesus is telling her that she is a child of God and because she is a child of God, she is loved. So, just as we understand that Jairus loves his daughter and pleads earnestly with Jesus to save her, we know that God loves this woman even more. In the story we need an illustration of the extent of God’s love, but God’s love is infinite. A glimpse of Jairus’ love for his daughter is as close as we can come to understanding God’s love for us.

Jesus then tells the woman that she may “go in peace.” She has been “freed of her suffering.” And so, she moves out of

the gospels, and the story of Jairus now comes back into focus. Some people come to Jairus and tell him that his “daughter is dead!” (v. 35) He can hardly believe it. On being told he would surely be in denial and would want to check out the reality of the situation for himself.<sup>4</sup> Panic would be rising up within him, but Jesus knew what was going on his mind. Jesus tells him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” (v. 36)

Just what is it that Jairus must believe? That is a good question. Mark doesn’t come out and say. Does it mean to have faith in the healing power of Jesus as the Son of God – in fact as God? Or does it mean to have belief that Jesus can heal through some magical incantation? In ancient Israel there were people who went around performing magic, and it was thought that they had amazing powers. We might think of Simon Magus. But we know the power of Jesus is because of the presence of God not because of a carefully orchestrated illusion. It is then, ultimately, a person’s faith in God that “saves” them. It all does come back to the Reformation idea that we are first saved by grace, and that grace comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus is telling Jairus, that all he needs is to have faith in Jesus as the Savior.

After this, saving the daughter of Jairus from death (v. 42) is *pro forma*. Indeed, it must happen. Jesus simply says, “*Talitha koom!*” (tal’uh-thuh-koom<sup>5</sup>). Mark tells us, “Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around.”

So, the daughter of Jairus is saved. The woman with the flow of blood has been saved, and the saving power of Jesus has been demonstrated. We know God has healing power. But

how does this healing power manifest itself in our own time and place?

Now, it is time for a bit of testimony. I believe I have seen God's healing power in action. I have a friend who was diagnosed with cancer, and it became so acute that she was told by her doctors she only had three months left to live. Now, this is a woman with profound faith, indomitable spirit, and strong constitution. She was willing to do the spiritual, physical, and mental work necessary to be cured. She started chemo, and she prayed. She modified her diet, and she prayed. She did all she could to keep going and in six months her cancer was in remission. But it came back and her kidneys failed. She went on dialysis and chemo at the same time, and she prayed, and we all prayed for her. Soon she went off dialysis and chemo. She was frail at this point, but she carried on. Her faith sustaining her. She has gone through this process at least three times and still she continues in her powerful faith and her love of God. Last I heard she had battled off cancer once again. Her story is inspiring. Yet, I see it demonstrating the power faith.

Now you can say that her repeated recoveries were due to advances in modern medicine. Certainly, that is a factor. You can say that her healing was due to the power of a positive attitude and the strength of her will. This, I believe, is also true, but there is no doubt in my mind that it is her faith that has sustained her in this life. It is her faith that has made all of the difference, making possible her physical healing. And there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that it will be her faith that will ultimately mean her salvation, bringing her into the next life,

when that eventuality finally occurs because that eventuality will occur for all of us.

We know that God's power can heal us physically. It is a miracle of God that when we are scratched we heal. It is a miracle of God when an infected appendix is removed by a doctor. I would say God can heal anything at any time. God can even heal outside of the physical laws of the universe as we understand them because God can do anything. But, I think God generally works through creation: working through doctors, and working through our bodies' natural healing processes.

And God can heal us in other ways as well. God can heal our hearts and minds so that we do not engage in self-destructive behavior. God can heal our attitudes and so repair our relationships with others. God can restore our will so that we can confidently move forward.

So then, what is the role of faith and prayer? There is no doubt in my mind that these are effective in healing. After all, it is prayer and faith that connects us to God, and you will surely remember that Jesus told us "ask and you will receive."

Yet, there are times we can have faith, and determination, and pray for physical healing, and not be "miraculously healed". This is no deficiency in our faith or deficiency in God's love for us. It is, rather, that God has a plan, and that plan may mean that God would have us live like Paul, with a thorn in our side (2 Corinthians 12:7). But ultimately it means that each and every one of us has a time at which our lives here in this world will end and our lives in the next world will begin. Just know this, that our God is a God of love who loves us even more than

Jairus loved his daughter because we are children of God. And when we pray, God will answer our prayers. But, when we pray, we must remember it is God's will, not our will, that we pray for. If we pray for comfort, God will bring us comfort. If we pray for love, God will bring us love. When we pray for God to save us, God through Jesus Christ saves us. For it is God's will that we have all of these things, comfort, love, and saving Grace.

Let us pray...Please bow your heads...

O Lord, there is so much that needs healing in this world. There are broken bodies, broken relationships, broken places. Lord we pray for healing and your saving grace, that all things be made new. Let all of this be according not to our will, but your will, O Lord, Father, Son and Spirit...

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<sup>1</sup> NIB, Vol VIII, p.588.

<sup>2</sup> BibleWorks, see entry for Mark 5:34.

<sup>3</sup> <http://biblehub.com/mark/5-34.htm> (accessed June 28, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Collier, 1969) 34.

<sup>5</sup> Harper's Bible Pronunciation Guide (New York: Harper and Row, 1989) 132.