

It has been a busy couple of days for Jesus. When we meet Jesus in our text for this morning, he has spent the last few days delivering lessons on the seashore, he stopped a storm in its tracks, and he expelled a legion of unclean spirits from a Gentile man before the people in the area sent him away out of fear. Jesus and his disciples have crossed back over to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and are swarmed by people seeking his help and his wisdom. Among them is Jairus, a leader of the synagogue who falls at Jesus' feet and begs him, repeatedly to heal his daughter. Jairus would have been a man with financial means and authority in the community. It is safe to assume that he has tried many other means for healing and nothing has worked. Jesus follows Jairus and they head toward Jairus' home where his daughter's health is quickly deteriorating. But their journey to Jairus' home is interrupted.

As they make their way through the crowd, Jesus senses that his power of healing has flowed out from him. Not in the sense that it is gone, but that he feels the connection. Jesus could have ignored this and continued following Jairus, but he doesn't. He stops and seeks out the person who received his healing power without his knowledge. The text says she falls down before him in fear and trembling. She had good reason to be afraid. Jesus would have been within his right to be angry that this woman basically stole a healing from him. Her condition meant that she was ritually unclean. In ancient Israel, it is likely that this woman would have been a social outcast and she would have had to live in isolation. For 12 years, she had been separated from other human beings, to keep her from making others unclean as well. When she passed people on the road, they would have moved away from her, fearing that she might brush against them. It is difficult to imagine such a lonely and dehumanizing existence.

When she hears that Jesus is nearby she takes a huge risk. But it appears that she is at the end of her rope and as tried everything to be made well. Healers were not uncommon in those days. Typically connected to the synagogue, they would charge a fee for the healing. After 12 years of seeking help, this woman had depleted all of her resources and was faced with what seemed like her only choice, to steal a healing from Jesus. Maybe she is also afraid if she asks Jesus for help that he will say no or maybe

she is afraid that she would be ridiculed by the crowd further alienated by her community.

So in the midst of rushing to heal Jairus' daughter, the daughter of a powerful and wealthy man, Jesus stops to seek out the invisible, the fearful, the alienated. The woman had already been healed of her sickness. The text makes that clear. But Jesus knows there is more healing beyond that of her physical ailment. He calls her into relationship with him and in doing so not only gives her back her health but also her humanity. He calls her daughter – she goes from being nameless and invisible to understanding that she one of God's beloved children. Jesus heals her not only of her physical ailments but brings her wholeness in restoring her humanity and bringing her back into community.

This text brings up some difficult questions about healing. Why are some people made well and others aren't? Why do innocent and good people suffer while others seem to have miraculous recoveries? It's not fair. I will be the first one to tell you that I don't have the answers. I do think that sometimes healing doesn't always look the way we think it should.

The Rev. Michael Lindvall tells the story of a friend of his, a man of deep faith, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in his fifties. The man and his wife prayed for years that he might be healed of his disease. Twenty years later, the disease had progressed to a debilitating stage. And yet, in a conversation the man told Lindvall that his prayers had been answered. With absolute sincerity, the man said, "I *have* been healed, not of Parkinson's disease, but I have been healed of my fear of Parkinson's disease."¹

After my dad was removed from the transplant list due becoming too weak to likely survive the surgery and recovery process, I struggled with what to pray for. A close friend of his refused to give up hope that he might be healed of his disease if we only prayed hard enough. Every time he spoke with her, she told him how much she

¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, vol. Year B, Volume 3 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

had been praying that God would heal his liver. She was praying for a miracle. Modern science tells us that livers in failure do not get better. But she was relentless. After a year or so, I actually started to get frustrated with her. My dad's decline had in fact slowed down and the hospice team was surprised at how slowly he was progressing. My dad started to wonder if her prayers were working. Her unwavering faith that my dad would get better emboldened the denial he held about his illness and he started to believe that he might actually beat his liver failure. That somehow, his liver would begin to repair itself and he would be back to normal. To be clear, there was no change in the medical treatments he received. There was no experimental treatment that he was trying, so hope of a cure seemed really misguided. My dad was in deep denial about his health. He talked about traveling to Germany even though a 20 minute car ride often made him sick to his stomach. When it finally became clear to him that he was indeed dying, it seemed to hit him like a ton of bricks. He wasn't ready.

I sometimes wonder if he wouldn't have been better served with prayers for a different kind of healing. Healing of his worry, of his fear, of the wounds of the past. A healing of old resentments that would have brought him closer to those whom he had hurt. I have mentioned many times in worship that I don't know how prayer works but I know that it does. Sometimes it works in ways we don't understand, at least not right away.

In the last month or two of his life, my dad did start to come to terms with his dying. He began having visions of transitions like parades and bridges, symbols of moving from one plane of existence to another. Sometimes God works even when we don't ask.

While me may not see evidence of God healing physical ailments like Jesus did in the gospel accounts of his ministry, there are endless examples of people healing from the fear, anxiety, or anger associated whatever is causing brokenness in their lives. I find hope in the possibility that our connection with God might bring us into a different kind of wholeness that we imagined for ourselves. A wholeness that involves restoring our sense of worthiness, minimizing our worry, reconnecting us to community and those whom we love. After 12 years of being isolated, of never being touched, of

feeling like there was absolutely no hope, the hemorrhaging woman was bold enough to reach out for the healing she needed. May we be so bold to reach out to God in our time of need. And to be open to the many possibilities of what God has in store for us. That we may find healing not only as individuals but as communities, as nations, and as a world that brings us wholeness and connection to our fellow children of God.