



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
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*HOW IS JESUS STILL HEALING TODAY?*  
Mark 5:21-43

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This story grabs me every time. It is an intricately woven narrative, a story within a story, a miracle within a miracle: Two healings, one of a twelve-year-old girl, the other a woman sick for twelve years. I want us to look carefully at these two stories ... and at the larger picture of Jesus the Healer.

Jairus, the leader or president of the local synagogue, came to Jesus, knelt down and pleaded with Jesus to come to his house and heal his daughter, who was near death. Life doesn't get any more real or any more desperate than that. T. S. Eliot speaks of:

"...the purification of the motive  
In the ground of our beseeching."  
("Little Gidding")

At the end of the story we learn that she was twelve. WHY does this detail pull at my heart? IS IT BECAUSE I've been the father of a twelve-year-old girl, and the grandfather of one? Do you remember when you were twelve? The summer when you turned twelve?

Is it the thought that the very God who created this vast universe would actually notice a twelve-year-old? That God cares not just for the world, and for Israel, but also for a preteen middle-school girl who has gotten very sick?

Jesus, without a hint of hesitation, immediately goes to the girl's house.

En route, a second figure enters the scene: a woman chronically ill with hemorrhages that have not stopped in twelve years. From the text we really don't get the exact diagnosis, but her story is clearly a long trail of tears and disappointment. She has been from physician to physician with no cure, spent all of her money, and now she's worse off than ever. I've known situations like that even today. And to top it off, this woman's flow of blood probably made her ritually unclean, which meant she was unable to go to the temple, unable to touch or be touched without making others unclean; she was certainly childless, and my guess is that she had been divorced by her husband BECAUSE of her condition.



People who suffer from some chronic illness are often passed from doctor to doctor. In the process, those around them ask, often judgmentally: "What's the deal ... why can't she get well?!" And on top of those comments they question themselves: "Why can't I get well?" "Is it my faith ... not strong enough?" "Have I not practiced my visualization technique rigorously enough?"

She obviously had heard of the wonders Jesus had been performing. COULD he help HER? She moved toward him from behind, so he wouldn't see her ... so the crowd wouldn't see her. "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well," she said, with a kind of hope that took her by surprise. Her courage reminds me of a line from a Samuel Beckett play: "I can't go on, I'll go on."

Immediately she "felt in her body" that she had been healed. And just as suddenly Jesus felt a "power" go out of him ... through him to her.

The phrase "*felt in her body*" is a suggestive one. It's important in the healing process to pay attention to your body, to seek its wisdom, to learn what it's trying to say to you. Back before I had my knee replaced in 1999, my doctor told me to "pay attention to my body, it'll tell you when it's time to have that knee replaced."

And also note that “power” Jesus felt leave him. It was the divine power flowing from God, through him, to the woman. Jesus was a vessel, and in this particular case, an unconscious vessel. He didn’t know that she had touched his clothes or that she had even come for healing.

*Jesus, the healer, is healer only and inasmuch as he is the POWER and PRESENCE of God to that person. And he is the instrument of the LARGER HEALING MINISTRY of God available to ALL persons throughout the world ... through the Spirit of God.*

“Daughter,” he said to her, “your faith has made you well.” He was restoring her to daughterhood, beloved daughter of GOD and daughter of ABRAHAM. And she had made herself available to the power and presence of God by BELIEVING in Jesus AS the power and presence of God to HER.

Sometimes we need somebody else to help us in the healing process. We cannot do it on our own. So God sends partners to us in the healing process: medical doctors, pharmacists, spiritual healers, nurses, social workers, therapists, groups like AA. James tells us that “Every good and perfect gift is from above.” (James 1:17) In this short list are examples of those gifts God gives to assist us in our healing.

*But the church itself can be a partner with God in the ministry of healing ... the public presence of the kingdom of God that brings healing in so many ways.*



Then Jesus heads on toward Jairus’ house. On the way a messenger comes with the news that the girl has died. Jesus goes on anyway.

When he arrived, a crowd was already gathered in full-funeral mode ... “weeping and wailing loudly.” And Jesus says, “Why the commotion, the weeping and wailing? The child is not dead but sleeping.”

Then we get this startling detail: “And the crowd laughed at him” with some translations adding, “with scorn.” Do you see that it was the laughter of cynicism? Not the laughter of joy that comes when someone is made well, but a kind of self-defense laughter. They’d already determined what was possible and not possible.

Wouldn’t you agree that sometimes our disappointment leads us there as well? We’ve experienced too much heartbreak ... too many unanswered prayers.

Then the text says something even more startling: “Then he put them all outside”! Jesus the BOUNCER! Told them to GET OUT of the house.

So now, in the house, were just Jesus, the parents, the girl and three disciples, Peter, James and John. Jesus took her by the hand and said, “Talitha Cum” ... Aramaic for “Little girl, get up!” And immediately she got up and walked around. And Jesus said, “Give her something to eat.”

Sometimes people think we’re dead when we’re not. Sometimes WE think we’re dead when we’re not, and Jesus the healer, the resurrection and the life, comes and says, RISE!

The kingdom of God means many things: justice, joy, mercy, compassion, inclusion, peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, home. But it means HEALING, too.

In Matthew’s Gospel alone we have fifteen individual healings and thirteen group healings. I haven’t counted them in Mark ... had to come up with the number in Matthew years ago in seminary. If any one wants to count them in Mark ... let me know what you find.

The individual healings were:

a leper

a centurion’s paralyzed servant

Peter’s mother-in-law with a fever (yes, mothers-in-law, too!)

a paralyzed man

the daughter of Jairus

the woman with the hemorrhages

two blind men

a man possessed with a demon unable to speak  
the Canaanite woman's daughter possessed of a demon  
a man with a withered hand  
a man blind and mute  
a man's epileptic son  
and two more blind men.

(Matthew's individual healings: 8:1-4, 8:5-13, 8:14-15, 8:28-32, 9:2-8, 9:18-26, 9:20-22, 9:27-31, 9:32-34, 12:9-13, 12:22-23, 15:21-28, 17:14-18, 20:29-34.)

In group healings where many were healed at one time Jesus healed:  
the blind  
the lame  
the deaf  
he fed the hungry multitude (yes, this a miracle too, a social miracle)  
people with seizures  
the maimed  
the mute  
lepers  
the paralyzed  
those with evil spirits  
those harassed and helpless  
those trapped in sin  
those walking in the shadow of death.

(Matthew's group healings: 4:23-24, 8:16-17, 9:35-36, 10:8, 11:5, 12:15, 14:14, 14:34-36, 15:30, 15:32-39.)

*How many ways are there to be a leper, paralyzed, blind, without voice, deaf, maimed, sick with your child's sickness, heart-sick, soul-sick, sin-sick?*

*Healing is NOT an incidental part of the Gospels.* If you took scissors and cut out all the miracles, your New Testament would look like the sheet of paper after paper dolls have been cut out. Thomas Jefferson cut them all out, as do some Jesus scholars. But John P. Meier, a first-rank historical Jesus scholar and Catholic priest, concludes after great research into the matter:

I use the criteria of historicity to establish the global assertion that, during his public ministry, Jesus claimed to work miracles, that Jesus was thought to work miracles by his contemporaries, friend and foes alike, and that Jesus did indeed do some extraordinary deeds that his adversaries explained by claiming that he was in league with demonic powers...

A completely non-miraculous Jesus, an idea propagated by Enlightenment thinkers like Thomas Jefferson, is a prime example of recasting a first-century prophet to fit the sensibilities of a modern intellectual elite.

(John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), Vol. 2, p. 12.)



As I've stated, the kingdom of God means healing too: physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, communal, ecological, political. And when Jesus sent his disciples out on mission, he sent them to do three things: PREACH, TEACH and HEAL. We tend to work hard at the first two and run from the third, or politely ignore it.

Maybe it's because we have too narrow a definition of healing.

Maybe because we've seen too many TV faith-healers and heard the stories of the plants in the audience.

But God's ministry of healing is deeper and broader than we think. There are slow-motion healings, as well as dramatic, unexplainable healings. There are everyday, ordinary, but not really ordinary, healings as well as life-saving miracles.

Our preschool kids in chapel often show me their Band-aids and hurt places. They are marking their healings ... just as important as crutches on the wall at the basilica in Lourdes, France.

Sometimes we hand healing off to doctors and the medical profession ... make them our designated batters in the healing enterprise. But God has many kinds of HEALING and many kinds of HEALERS.

Unquestionably, Christ has called us to a healing ministry in the church ... the church as healer! The community of faith as a place where healing takes place ... body, mind, and spirit.

Maybe we should call it "The HEALTH and HEALING Ministry of Jesus at Lakewood Presbyterian Church" ... like we have the CHRISTIAN EDUCATION MINISTRY of Jesus at Lakewood Presbyterian Church or the OUTREACH MINISTRY of Jesus at Lakewood Presbyterian Church or the WORSHIP MINISTRY of Jesus at Lakewood Presbyterian Church or the EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH MINISTRY of Jesus at Lakewood Presbyterian Church or the CONGREGATIONAL CARE MINISTRY of Jesus at Lakewood Presbyterian Church.

This HEALING MINISTRY of Jesus includes the prayers we pray at worship, and in Sunday School classes, in small groups, and at our Session meetings each month. It includes the prayers of the email prayer chain and our telephone prayer chain.

There's a "Mother's Prayer Chain" at my home church in St. Clairsville. Someone wrote of it: "I'll take them ... the mystical prayers of old mothers ... Because it matters ... all this patient and purposeful love."

*That's the KEY, isn't it: PATIENT and PURPOSEFUL LOVE.*

*That's why we pray. And I suspect Jesus would like all that!*



In conclusion, I think every healing story in the Gospels nudges us to ask these *three important questions*:

How have I received the healing ministry of Jesus?

How do I need the healing ministry of Jesus?

How am I sharing in the healing ministry of Jesus?

How have you received healing? Testify about it!

How do you need healing? Dare to ask for it!

How would you like to share in the health and healing ministry of Jesus at LPC? Come talk to us ... we just might have something you can do!

These three questions will increase our thanks and praise. They will give us hope for our own healing. They will send us forth into the world not only to preach and teach, but also to ... HEAL.

Amen and Amen.

Having said all of that, I invite you to come to our Service of Wholeness and Healing this Wednesday evening. Where do you need healing? Where does our community need healing? Where does our world need healing? These we will address ... with PATIENT and PURPOSEFUL LOVE.