

Healing, Wholeness and Holiness (part II)

Mark 5:21-43 Oak Grove Presbyterian Church Bill Chadwick

July 5, 2009

Last week we began our look at this passage and noted that this woman's physical condition would have made her ritually unclean. She could never go to the synagogue. Every chair she sat on or bed she laid in would be made unclean, ritually unclean. She could not touch anyone, without making them unclean. She would have been an outcast, like someone with leprosy.

But Jesus broke all the rules, letting an unclean woman touch him and then speaking with her in public. We saw how through her physical healing Jesus restored her to the community. And we were challenged to be equally inclusive in our own ministry and mission in this community and throughout the world.

I suggested that there are at least three other intersections between these stories and our stories.

First: William Lane notes that the people at Jairus' house who immediately move into mourning mode with their wailing and weeping and who deride Jesus when he tells them to stop, "represent the hard-core realists of every age who...fail to account for divine possibilities." (William Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark*, 1974, p. 167)

Hard-core realists. Now last week I talked about the fact that most of the miracles we pray for don't happen and it's not because we don't have enough faith. I don't know why. On the other hand, in rare cases the unexplained does take place following our prayers. The idea of "hard-core realists" comes into play in other situations. In phrases like, "We gotta run the church like a business." Well, yes and no. It's important for us to remember that, unlike a business, the bottom line for a church is not the financial bottom line, it's being faithful to the leading of the Spirit, even if that is in very surprising ways and in very unusual places.

As the followers of Jesus we're not called to be "realists" if that means aligning ourselves with the surrounding culture. Rather, we're called to envision the ideal and work and pray to transform the surrounding culture into that ideal. Jesus changed the definition of realistic.

I once was given an interesting gift by one of my parishioners. It's a sign with a baseball scoreboard on it. It shows the inning by inning score of a game between the Realists and the Idealists. In the first inning the Realists score two runs, the Idealists fail to score. In the third inning the Realists add on another run and in the fourth break the game open with four runs. Meanwhile the Idealists continue to get shut out. Two more runs in the fifth, one in the sixth, six more in the eighth and a final two in the ninth. Simple arithmetic tells us the score is 18 to zip, Realists over the Idealists. But the scoreboard total reads: Idealists 1, Realists 0. That's the scoreboard for the life of discipleship.

There is an old saying, “Human futility is God’s opportunity.” Later in the gospel, Jesus declares that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven and the disciples logically wail, “Who then can be saved?” And Jesus replies, “What is impossible for people is possible for God.”

And Paul gives that triumphant cry in the book of Philippians—it’s one of the affirmations I repeat to myself as part of my morning devotions—Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through (Christ) who strengthens me.”

So friends, let us not limit what is possible with God.

Second: We see in these stories the healing power of touch. We know that babies who don’t get held enough have serious emotional problems and sometimes even die. Years ago psychologist Virginia Satir stated that people need four hugs a day for emotional survival, eight for maintenance and twelve for growth. Ouch. Most of us are in trouble in this department. Unless we’re in a brand new romantic relationship or we have little children in our lives I daresay we are not getting enough hugs.

A business executive became depressed. Things were not going well at work, and he was bringing his problems home with him every night. Every evening he would eat his dinner in silence, shutting out his wife and five-year-old daughter. Then he would go into the den and read the paper using the newspaper to wall his family out of his life.

After several nights of this, one evening his daughter took her little hand and pushed the newspaper down. She then jumped into her father’s lap, wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him strongly. The father said abruptly, “Honey, you are hugging me to death!” “No, Daddy,” the little girl said, “I’m hugging you to life!”

This was the greatness of Jesus. He took people where they were—sick, lame, lepers, occasionally even dead!—and hugged them to life. Touch.

I think some teenagers turn to sex when what they are really craving is simply to be held. Maybe not just teenagers. As parents, Kris and I hug our teenagers all the time, whether they want it or not. Granted, in our society today hugging is a bit touchier, pun intended, than it used to be. But we do need to find ways to appropriately touch each other. Even if we are Norwegian. The only folks who have more trouble with emotions and touching than the Scandihoovians are the English, which we Chadwicks are on both sides of the family. For example, the trouble we have with emotions: my brother Cal and his wife, Bev, have been married 41 years. He loves her so much he almost told her once.

(When Cal was so excited about me coming here I told him maybe he should be careful what he wishes for.)

Anyhow, touch is a powerful and healing gift from God.

Finally, look at the chutzpah of this woman with the hemorrhage. She had attempted everything to be healed. No doubt she had tried all the ritual cures. The Jewish Talmud

itself gives no fewer than eleven of them. Some of them are tonics and astringents: but others include carrying the ashes of an ostrich egg in a linen rag in summer and cotton rag in winter; or carrying a kernel of barley corn which had been found in the dung of a donkey, and not just any old donkey, but a white female donkey (Wm. Barclay, Daily Study Bible). (This will not be on the final.) Not surprisingly, those remedies didn't help. Doctors didn't help. The only burden the doctors lifted from her was her savings.

But now she had heard that a rabbi with amazing powers had come to town. In other villages he had reportedly cured all sorts of people with any number of ailments. Perhaps he could cure her! But how could she get to him? A patriarchal society; women in the background. Because of her illness she's not supposed to even be in the city limits, but out of her desperation she comes up with a plan: "If I but touch his robe...If I but touch his robe...If I but touch his robe, perhaps I will be healed."

How to get to that robe? Thanks to her veil and the chaos of the crowds she is able to implement this plan, sneaking in behind Jesus and touching his clothes. And Jesus is able to do for her what no one else could do.

Same with Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue with the critically ill daughter. It couldn't have been easy for Jairus to turn to this itinerant preacher that his Pharisee friends had no doubt warned him against. But in his desperation Jairus throws himself at Jesus' feet.

I run into people occasionally who think that they are too inconsequential and their problems are not big enough to bother God about. "God has bigger fish to fry," they think.

Friends, if we learn anything from the life of Jesus it is that God is not too busy to be concerned about you, your life, and your problems.

Whether you are a basketball fan or not, you are probably familiar with the name Larry Bird, the former basketball great of the Boston Celtics. During a retirement party for Larry Bird in Boston Garden, his former coach, K.C. Jones, told of diagramming a play on the sidelines late in a crucial game, only to have Bird dismiss it, saying: "Get the ball to me and get everyone out of my way."

Jones responded: "I'm the coach, and I will call the plays." Then Jones turned to the other players and said: "Here's our new play: Get the ball to Larry, and get out of his way."

That is our final point for today. When those times of desperation overwhelm us, when it seems the light will never come and we have nowhere else to turn, give the ball to Jesus and get out of the way. In the wise words of the 12-step community, "Let go and let God."

Recap, starting with last week what we learn from this rich passage:

1. The radical inclusivity of the gospel. May our welcome be as wide and warm as Jesus' welcome.
2. Don't let the self-proclaimed "realists" get you down. All things are possible with God.
3. In the gift of touch there is great healing power.
4. Get the ball to Jesus and get out of the way. Let go and let God.

May the living word of these intertwined stories
of the woman with the hemorrhage
and the raising of Jairus' daughter,
take root and bear fruit in our lives,
that we may be faithful and that we will know joy and grace.

To God be the honor and the glory and the praise, now and forever. Amen.