

United Church of Christ at the Villages  
June 28, 2015  
“New Life in Christ”  
Monica Peidl

*Friends, let us pray...*

*O great loving and compassionate God, give us to have the courage to reach out to you when we are in need of your compassionate healing. Help us to know that no matter who we are, or where we are on our journey, you will always be there for us. Amen.*

In today’s gospel, Mark weaves together two different stories of healing. First, we meet Jairus, the rich and powerful synagogue leader, who ran to Jesus just as he had got off the boat and the crowds of people were gathering around him. Jairus’ deep love for his daughter compels him to publicly beg – a posture that no man in his time and of his position would consider if he felt he had another choice. What level of desperation must he have reached to beg Jesus to heal his daughter? Because his daughter is at the point of death, he casts aside all pretenses.

When Jairus asks for help, Jesus goes with him. No questions asked, no delay. Calm and cool as a cucumber, Jesus responds to the request. Despite the fact that Jesus was probably tired, despite the fact that a great crowd was pressing into him, Jesus sees the need and responds.

While Jesus is on the way to Jairus’ home, we meet an unnamed woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Her illness has defined her life and her place in the community. She is financially bankrupt, emotionally spent, and physically weak. She is on the margins of society. As a last resort, she seeks out Jesus hoping to find healing. And yet, we hear in the gospel that even in her desperation, she does not have the courage to go to directly to Jesus to ask for what she needs. Rather, she believes if she can just get close enough and touch his hem, perhaps she will be healed. In contrast to Jairus who asks for healing, she covertly—secretly—quietly—touches Jesus’ clothes as he walks through a crowd.

At first, Jesus doesn't even know who touched him, or who he healed, until the woman speaks up. Jesus invites her to come close to him, talk to him, and tell him about her circumstances. He sees the whole picture. In his compassion, he sees that she is too timid or too afraid or too hopeless to ask for healing. Speaking her story, her truth with Jesus brings about her complete healing, not just from her disease but from the pain of her isolation.

Jesus opens his heart to her and tells her that she is valuable and worthy of being loved. He calls her "daughter". In that moment, she was lifted up from being one who felt she had to sneak up behind Jesus and anonymously receive the gifts of God to one who was recognized by and acknowledged by Jesus himself. He lets her know that not only her physical problem, but her entire life, will be healed by the grace of a God who loves even her! The remarkable aspect of her story is not the anonymous cure, but rather the person to person encounter with Jesus and the beginning of her new life.

Meanwhile, Jesus has not forgotten about Jairus' and his daughter. A messenger from Jairus' home has come and told Jairus that his daughter was dead, so don't bother asking Jesus to come. Jesus, again, calmly says: "Do not fear, only believe." And Jesus continues to Jairus' home. When they arrive, the mourners are crying and the mourners scoff at Jesus when he tells them that the little girl is just sleeping. Jesus goes to the little girl's side, touches her, speaks to her kindly, tells her to get up ... and she does and she is healed!

We must wonder, however, if this story is more about Jairus being healed than it is about his child being healed. For Jairus, perhaps regaining his wholeness was discovered in the fact that he loved his daughter so much that he would do anything to save her life. His healing was realized in his willingness to abandon the things that had defined him -- his position and his sense of pride --- and to turn without shame to Jesus who alone could answer his deepest need. Perhaps Jairus was also healed in his encounter with Jesus, and he has also found new life.

I can see Jairus rejoicing and shouting the words of Psalm 30 that we heard earlier this morning as he saw his daughter wake up. From verses 11 and 12..... "You changed my mourning into dancing. You took off my funeral clothes and dressed me up in joy so that my whole being might sing praises to you and never stop. LORD, my God, I will give thanks to you forever."

These two stories that Mark entwines together seem very different, but at their most profound level, they are the very same story – the story of searching for hope in the midst of desperation, of compassion extended through healing and ultimately of an encounter with Jesus that transformed lives. No longer would the hemorrhaging woman be defined by her illness. No longer would Jairus be defined by his position or his pride. They are starting a new life and it's all about the encounter with a compassionate Jesus who extended mercy, healing and abounding grace. They have a new relationship with themselves, with the community and with a great compassionate God.

Henri Nouwen, states that to take a Biblical healing story at face value is to miss the point. He says, "What's important is not the healing of the sick, but the deep compassion that moved Jesus" to heal in the first place. Indeed, one of the remarkable qualities of Jesus was his willingness to immerse himself in the human situation and to be deeply moved by a compassion that compelled him to help and to heal. He lived it and he taught it in the parables such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal son.

Jesus chose not to leave people in the condition in which he found them. He was about opening people up to new possibilities bringing new hope and new life. Jesus was understanding of human sorrow and suffering. People were never a nuisance or an interruption, but rather, an opportunity to serve.

We see in these stories today, and some of the other healing stories we have heard in recent weeks, Jesus' willingness and desire to bring compassionate healing to our lives and make our brokenness whole. We all need healing to one extent or another -- whether it be physical healing, healing of relationships or the healing that forgiveness brings.

Just as with Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman, God patiently invites us to share our troubles, speak aloud our pain, confess our sins, end the hiding and the feeling ashamed. God invites us to be set free from those things that might separate us from other people and from God, just as he set Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman free.

God will not judge us or tell us we are unclean or unworthy. God will not turn away from us or reject us. What God will do is listen to our pain, pour out healing grace upon us and restore us to wholeness. If we but ask, God will accept us and love us, just as we are. All we've have to do is find the

courage to ask, and open our hearts to receive the healing grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This healing that comes to us as we encounter Jesus leads to the sort of wholeness which somehow permeates our entire beings and all of our relationships. The real power of healing comes from our encounter with God, from knowing that no matter what it is that has made us feel unclean, isolated, alone, unworthy of love, maybe even desperate—no matter what it is that we need relief from— all we have to do is reach out and God will reach right back to us and welcome us into new life.

What a friend we have in Jesus! All our sins and grief to bear; what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged; take it to our God in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to our God in prayer.

Amen.