

“What does it matter?” A story of two healings and the Kingdom of God

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The 5th Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 5:21-43

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I grew up with two little sisters. Most of the arguments in our house, centered around our rooms not being clean. My mother wanted me to make my bed every day. My response was, “Why should I make it? I’m just going to unmake it at night and have to do it over tomorrow? What does it matter?”

“What does it matter?” That was a question I asked a lot when I was growing up. I still ask it today. In the appointed Gospel reading for this week, we have a story about healing, actually, two healings...a woman who was sick for a long time and a little girl who was raised from the dead. People asked for healing and they got it. Jesus is the Son of God. When he walked this earth, he performed miracles wherever he went. What does that matter for us today?

Sometimes I have a little trouble with these stories of healing. I wonder how they will sound to my people who are sitting in the pews or listening to my sermons online. I know for a fact some of them have asked the Lord to heal their bodies, or to heal the bodies of their loved ones, and it has not happened. I know I have prayed and asked Jesus to heal people and sometimes they die anyway. If that is the case, what does this story mean for us? What does it matter?

If all of us are going to die anyway, what does it matter if we are healed for a little while? Even the little girl and the woman in the story grew old, they still died eventually.

Let’s think about this. Let’s try and imagine it. Imagine you are Jairus. You are a powerful man--the leader of the synagogue. You are frustrated and frightened. You have tried everything to save your little girl, and nothing is working. Jesus is your last hope and here he is healing this strange woman when you want him to hurry and get to your house and save your girl. When you get there, she is dead. You are sad beyond words. He raises her. He brings her back to life and health! Yes, someday she will grow old and die, but for now, your family is whole. It is a day of celebration. Does it matter to you? Of course, it does! It means everything.

It still matters today. Jairus was a powerful man and he had to admit he needed help. He humbled himself before Jesus and Jesus demonstrated his power over life and death. On the days that we get a little carried away with ourselves, on the days when we think we are in charge, we need to remember Jairus. No amount of power or wealth could save his little girl. This story reminds us who is the ultimate power and authority in our lives.

Now imagine you are that little girl. You are sick. You are weak and in pain. You have always counted on your parents to help you and they can’t. You just keep getting sicker and weaker. You are afraid and then you just slip away into the silent sleep of death.

Imagine being woke up from being dead! Imagine the cheering and the rejoicing. You will keep hearing this story your whole life. The Son of God touched you and you were healed. When you are on your death bed, will it matter? Of course, it will matter!

It matters for us too. It matters that we understand the power and the compassion of Christ. We can live our lives with the confidence that we are in good hands, no matter what trials we face.

Now, imagine you are that poor woman who was sick for twelve years. You have suffered terribly. Not only are you weak and sick, you're an outcast. In that society a person who is bleeding is considered ritually unclean. You can't be in any holy place.

We know the pain of not being allowed in our holy place. One church where I am the pastor has been online only for more than a year because of the pandemic. It is a source of sadness and frustration not to be able to welcome the congregation into the sanctuary because of Covid 19. Our pain is nothing compared to the woman in this story. Imagine not being allowed in the sanctuary for 12 long years because you are considered unclean.

You can't touch anyone, or they will be contaminated too. You've suffered by having doctors try all kinds of scary and painful treatments on you. There is no one to intercede for you, and you want to talk to Jesus. You know he can help you, but women are not allowed to approach men in public. And certainly, ritually unclean women are not allowed to touch anyone. Finally, you decide to take a chance. There is a huge crowd, maybe no one will notice. You sneak behind him and touch the hem of his robe. Right away the bleeding stops. You are healed!!!!

But then it happens. He knows. He says, "Who touched me?" You tell him the whole truth and he isn't mad. You tell him you were desperate and afraid. He doesn't look down on you. He doesn't send you away. He looks at you with love in his eyes and calls you "daughter." You are no longer an outcast. You are special. You are blessed. Does it matter? You bet it does!

There is so much we can take from this story besides the physical healing of one woman. This woman dared to approach Christ and claim what she needed from him. Society had deemed her unimportant and had given up on helping her have a full and healthy life. She did not take "no" for an answer and we don't have to either. She dared to approach Jesus and tell her truth. We can too.

Jesus did not see this woman as unimportant. Other people during this time thought women were somehow less than men and that the leader of the synagogue was more important than the ordinary person. Jesus did not agree. He reflected the creator's love for all people. The Bible is full of stories where God cares for the people that no one thinks are important. Stories where widows and the orphans are fed, stories where strangers and refugees are welcomed and the poor and the lame are put at the head of the table.

Imagine the healing that could happen in our communities and our country if we were to embrace God's way of thinking. Women would be equal to men. Black, brown and Asian people would be treated with respect. The frightened children at our borders would be lifted up and welcomed with open arms. Jesus did not reserve his healing or his compassion for one type of person. As the body of Christ in the world, we can do that too.

The gospel lesson today is about so much more than physical healing. It's about the Kingdom of God. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray the words, "Your kingdom come." We pray that God will make the kingdom Jesus had been preaching about finally come to pass—a kingdom where the poor will inherit the earth, the hungry will be filled, those who weep will laugh and death will be a thing of the past.

As Martin Luther pointed out in his Small Catechism, God's kingdom will come anyway, whether we pray for it or not, but in this prayer, we are asking that we might be a part of it--that we might know it and live it.

There are types of healing that are more important than physical healing. My own mother was an example of this. She was not a brave person. She was beautiful and kind, but she never handled trouble very well. When things went wrong, someone else needed to handle it. You just didn't wake my mom in the middle of the night and tell her there was an emergency or that someone had died. You had to let her get her sleep. If you were going to tell her bad news you had to bring her coffee and break it to her gently. She was one of those people who got upset easily. We all adored her, but she was sort of a "princess."

When I heard that my mother was dying. I was so sad, but I was more worried than anything else. I knew how scared she would be, and I wanted to be there with her. It turns out that I had nothing to worry about. My mother might have been sort of a princess, but she had a strong faith in Jesus. On her last day, in her 67th year, the doctors came in and told her they couldn't save her. The surgery they had planned to do was not going to work and she would most likely be dead by nightfall. She didn't panic. She didn't cry. She surprised everyone. She said, "I always wondered what it would be like to be told it was my last day on earth. It's okay. I am ready."

She spent the day saying goodbye to people and by that evening, she was gone. She did not get the physical healing that I prayed for her to have, but she got something more important. She got peace and calm. She got joy and the promise of eternal life. I imagine our Lord right there at her bedside. I imagine that he was saying, "Daughter, your faith has made you well." Amen

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