

Healing Our Broken World Readings: Mark 5:21-43 Proper 8/B 6/27/21
By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfriedt; St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Arroyo Grande, CA

When you think of Jesus, what image comes to your mind? Is it Jesus as the Good Shepherd? Jesus as the wisdom teacher? Jesus as a social prophet? Jesus as a charismatic healer? Jesus as the messiah? Jesus as the Son of God? There are many different ways to understand Jesus along with the main focus of his vocation. However, Jesus as ‘the healer’ is an image that is often understated. This is unfortunate, especially since we struggle with so much disease, suffering, and brokenness in our world today.

Did you know that nearly 20% of the Gospel accounts are devoted to Jesus’ healing ministry? These accounts include the circumstances, the methods used, the effects on those who were healed as well as those who were onlookers. The gospels give more attention to the healing ministry of Jesus than any one kind of experience recorded. Jesus healed the blind, the deaf, the leper, those with fever and epilepsy, demon possessed persons, young girls, beggars, women suffering from incurable diseases, and those who were considered dead.

Healing the sick was the hallmark of Jesus’ ministry; a concrete example of his love for humanity. He would look out at the crowds and have compassion for the sick, the sinner, and the broken. He worked tirelessly to make a difference by generously sharing his remarkable gift of healing. Being concerned about the whole person- body, mind, & spirit, he often healed with words, touch, prayer, and physical means. Since we Christians consider Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life, and thus are called to follow in his footsteps, how can we best share in the ministry of healing? This is the subject of today’s sermon. I will use the story of the woman with the hemorrhage as my text.

I don’t need to mention how broken the world is today. As I read the Washington Post while writing this sermon, there were so many articles on sickness and death. These included graphic details regarding the increase in homicides, traffic deaths, domestic abuse, and female models in the fashion industry who starved themselves in order to meet the weight requirement. There was advice on how to grieve for a miscarriage and ways of teaching teens about sex ed. Currently, there is a runaway mouse plague in Australia. Then there are the dismal predictions of a surge in COVID cases as vaccination rates lag. So far, almost 4 million people worldwide have died of the coronavirus while families in Asia are frantically trying to obtain cylinders of oxygen to keep their loved ones from dying from the virus.

When people are faced with the issue of sickness or death, they often leave the task to physicians, nurses, and other medical personnel to solve. Unfortunately, a lot of lay folks are unaware of the many things they can do to help relieve sickness and suffering in daily life. If we are ever to get a handle on healing the human race, then we need to roll up our sleeves, take stock of the skills and gifts that we do have, and then generously share them to help heal our broken world. Let’s take a look at today’s gospel for some insight.

A woman is described as having a chronic condition of bleeding for 12 years. She has already spent all her resources on physicians who have not been able to help her. Blood and discharge from the human body was considered unclean in Jewish society. Thus, a chronically bleeding woman would be pushed to margins, deemed impure, and forbidden to come in close contact with the public.

Nevertheless, having heard that Jesus had a remarkable gift of healing, she pushes through the crowd and touches his garment. “Immediately, her hemorrhage stopped and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.” (Mark 5:29) A few things stand out for me in this story: Her persistence, her faith, her advocacy for her own health, and her courage to push through the boundaries society imposed upon her. What also stands out for me is Jesus’ compassion and availability toward the complete stranger. While Jesus was gifted with an extraordinary power of healing, it was only when he shared this gift, that it did any good to help those in need. What qualities, skills, or gifts might you share as a lay minister of healing? Here are a few ideas.

1. **Compassion.** Compassion literally means “to suffer together.” It is that feeling that arises when you are confronted with another person’s suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering. Sometimes, compassion motivates us to do small acts of kindness, like bringing a meal to the sick, going to the pharmacy to pick up a prescription, or simply taking the time to listen to someone who is fragile. Other times, compassion motivates us to take care of a sick relative, to go on a mission, or to send a generous donation to a charity. My mother would often take me to visit her elderly aunts who were in their final years. My mother had no medical background but she did have a kind heart. She would simply sit and listen and laugh and delight in their

presence. No, she didn't have the remarkable gift of healing that Jesus had nor the skills of a physician. But what she did have, she gave generously to relieve the suffering of those who were lonely and fragile.

Many years ago, I had an office mate who came from a large Catholic family. When her mother delivered her ninth child, she was told that the baby was not viable and then was asked what she would like to have done. Without hesitation, the mother replied: "I will take the baby home and love it until its last day. So when she brought the baby home, she gathered all her children around her and said: "This is your baby brother who is ill and has only a short time to live. However, we will love and care for him as best as we can." And so they did! They loved him and held him and cared for him. Perhaps it was the love and compassion they showered upon this baby that gave him nine months of additional life. Jesus had compassion for the crowds which motivated his healing ministry. And as his disciples, we too are called to do likewise.

2. **Advocacy:** Advocacy is support for a cause or policy. We need to advocate for ourselves and others when it comes to healing. Being sidelined to the margins of society with little influence, the woman in today's gospel story needed to advocate for herself. She longed to have access to good medical care. She was so convinced that Jesus was her only chance for healing, that she pushed through the crowd, reaching for the hem of his garment. Through her persistence, she finally achieved her goal of healing after 12 years of suffering.

My mother tells the story of how in the early 1950's she thought we had all come down with polio. She frantically called the doctor to come immediately. Those were the days when doctors made house calls. The doctor agreed to come if she had the cash on hand. She told him that her husband was at work but would bring the money when he came home. The doctor refused to come, leaving my mother feeling helpless & frightened.

No one should be denied access to medical care because of their unfortunate circumstances or lack of money. This is a human right, not a privilege for the more fortunate. Many of the people that Jesus healed were those on the margins of society or those who were racially discriminated against by his society. His healings illustrated the compassion of God for outcasts and the priority of people over laws. And as his disciples, we too are called to advocate for access to medical care for all of God's people, not just those who are privileged to have good insurance or old enough to qualify for Medicare. I find it disheartening that there are people leading our country who continue to set up roadblocks, preventing the sick, the suffering, and the dying from accessing good medical care. Public Advocacy, demanding 'healthcare for all' is one of the important ways we Christians can participate in the ministry of healing.

3. **Faith.** Jesus said to the woman with the hemorrhage: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." (Mark 5:34) This passage can also be translated as: *your faith has saved you or your faith has made you whole*. Healing, wholeness, and salvation come from the same Greek word *sozo*. When I think of Jesus saving me, I think of being made whole. Today, our medical establishment can do far more for people's medical problems than Jesus ever could. It can restore the deaf through cochlear implants. Restore sight through cataract surgery. It can restore the heart and kidneys through transplants. It can heal the lame through knee replacement surgery and reverse some diseases & cancers through genetic engineering. In spite of all these remarkable advancements, many of us remain unwell, not whole. Why is that?

I think many have ignored the spiritual aspects of wellness, especially when it comes to taking care of our mental and emotional health. Without a healthy mind and spirit, our physical bodies will continue to suffer. For instance, we drink too much and eat too much, trying to satisfy the cravings of our bodies. We sit in front of the TV, listening to the fake news and fear mongers who traumatize our psyche. Many of our youth are turning to opioids to fill that empty hole in their lives. The greedy pharmaceutical industry has convinced us to take more, bigger, and better drugs to address all of our ailments. In June of last year, 40% of Americans reported struggling with mental health or substance use. Imagine - 40%! And though we are living longer, Americans are more frightened than ever to face death and say good-bye to this physical world.

These are all spiritual issues requiring a spiritual solution. This is where a life of faith comes in. Faith is a radical trust in life and by implication, trust in the Source of Life. Faith is not an intellectual belief in a list of doctrines but a trust in something or someone that can make us whole. For Christians, we put our faith in God, the one whom Jesus represents. When we abide in God and fully embrace this Source of Life, we begin to make different choices that will make us whole, make us well, save us. We will treat our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit, having compassion on this bodily chariot that carries us around. We will seek opportunities to help others, having compassion for the lost, the lonely, and the left behind. We will show compassion for the

vulnerable by getting the vaccine (not necessarily for ourselves alone) but to achieve herd immunity. I give thanks for those who lined up decades ago for the polio vaccine, sparing my family from this dreadful disease.

Brothers and sisters in Christ at St. Barnabas and beyond: You are a vital part of Jesus' healing ministry today. So when you wake up each morning, ask yourself, "How can I be a healing presence today?" And as your church leaders chart a course for the future, ask them: "How can we advocate for the sick, the suffering, and the dying? May God give you the strength to persevere and the will to accomplish this healing ministry.