

“Healing Power”
Sermon by Oby Ballinger
Edina Morningside Community Church; February 2, 2020

Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.”

So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

One of the things I did for fun in seminary was sing with the gospel choir. It was a community of deep care, and rehearsals were just as worshipful as the chapel services in which we sang. One favorite gospel song starts out this way: *“I need you. You need me. We’re all a part of God’s body. It is God’s will that every need be supplied. You are important to me—I need you to survive.”* The song is honest about vulnerability. *“I need you. You need me.”* We are necessary to one another—we cannot make it on our own.

That said, being vulnerable does not come easily. I’ve got a lot invested in the idea that I have all together. Discomfort with vulnerability is one reason why doctors and nurses make such crummy patients. It’s why many aging parents refuse to give up their keys. We want to convince as many people as possible that we’re in control, that we’ve got it all together. Sometimes the hardest words to say are, *“I need you.”*

Jairus and the woman in the gospel share their vulnerability, though. Jairus is a big man about town, a leader in the synagogue, well respected by his peers. She is an unnamed woman, penniless, medically compromised, socially isolated and ritually unclean because of her condition. But both of them are at the point where they don’t care anymore about appearing to be in control. They are willing to be honest and vulnerable about their needs, for the sake of healing. Jairus’ twelve-year-old daughter, the apple of his eye, lays dying at home. So he falls down at Jesus’ feet in front of everyone: *“Please come and help her. I know you can. I need you.”* The woman has spent everything she had, chasing doctors for twelve years and getting nowhere. So she reaches out her hand: *“If only I can touch his robe I will be healed.”*

How would the world be different if we praised such “I need you” vulnerability, rather than the illusion of self-sufficiency or perfection? Could we better connect with each other, recognizing humanity in those who are vulnerable and tender like ourselves? Yet our public and private lives seems marked by an unholy insistence on perfection. Fringe voices on the internet leave no room for flaws or mistakes in others, declaring “canceled” anyone who is not in lockstep with a given ideology. No wonder we have elected officials and candidates who puff up like roosters, declaring themselves perfect, fronting invincibility rather than vulnerability. Yet God demonstrates that perfection in Christ is facing the suffering of humanity rather than floating unharmed above it all. Only by entering *into* the mess of human life does God become “Emmanuel”, God with us. Healing power transforms the world through vulnerability, accepting that “I need you”.

Jairus is desperate enough to humble himself before the crowd and ask healing from Jesus for his daughter. The woman has guts enough to reach out and draw healing from Jesus even without his knowledge or intent. To both Jairus and the woman, Jesus commends the faith that they display. Note that faith here is not fervently held beliefs, but bold and committed action. Jesus says to the woman, “Your faith has made you well”. “Faith” here is the Greek word *pisteuo*, which means something like “trust-action”, putting trust into action. It’s the same word when Jesus tells Jairus, “Do not fear, only believe.” Have faith, and take trusting action. This is the path by which these two very different people are healed.

If only it were always so, but we *don’t* always get what we fervently pray for. Some prayers go unanswered, at least in the physical ways we often expect. Supernatural cures are not often the way of daily life, and reaching out for Jesus does not lift chronic pain, free us from cancer’s recurrence, or take away the need for surgery. God is no vending machine, dispensing cures when the right prayers in the right disposition have been said. So how do we find healing when it doesn’t come in a miraculous way?

I think about a woman I knew one summer when I was working as a hospital chaplain. I first met Fern when she had fallen down and ended up in the hospital. Fern was over 90 years old, and the fall had caused her a great deal of injury. She never fully recovered and eventually died. But what still brings Fern to mind these years later is her sense of humor. I’d go to visit her and she’d start telling funny stories the moment I walked in. Her daughter was often there, and together they would recount the stories of her life, laughing their way through the memories. Fern talked about her gratitude for life, and all the joy she had found in it. According to her, this last suffering was nothing compared to all the goodness that she remembered and stored up in her heart. Fern taught me the difference between healing and curing. She was vulnerable and in pain, but she had a faith in life and human goodness. Therefore, she *was* healed and she was whole, even if she was not cured or miraculously saved from what awaits us all.

We do not have the power of Jesus to heal and cure at will. But Church is God’s community of vulnerability and faithful action in the midst of life’s struggles. Here we hold the candle of God’s grace for one another when we fall sick or suffer the slings and arrows of life. If you are in the first year of suffering, the church is here to pray for you. If you have been suffering long, but no healing is on its way, the church waits with you, on your side. If you have just finally overcome years and years of pain, the church is here to give thanks and celebrate wildly. That is the faith we offer in situations of vulnerability.

By divine grace, suffering and death are not the last word. Jesus speaks Life in the face of Death, to Jairus, to the woman, to me and you. How can we offer the same when others around us are in need? Can we find the courage to ask for prayer when we have our own concerns? “I need you. You need me. We’re all a part of God’s body.” With joy when healing has come, with trust when healing is not yet in sight, with gratitude when healing comes even when a cure does not, we can faithfully say together, Thanks be to God.” Amen.