

Mark 5:21-43

June 27, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

Last week, at the end of the fourth chapter of Mark, we found Jesus in a boat with his disciples as they crossed the Sea of Galilee and were caught amidst a terrible storm that threatened their lives until the disciples awoke Jesus and he calmed the winds and the seas revealing his power over even the fiercest and most chaotic forces of nature. This week, our reading sets us in the fifth chapter, back on the Galilean side of the sea. What we did not hear is the first part of the chapter. The story of the healing of the demoniac by Jesus after the calming of the storm incident. Arriving on the other side, the land of the Gerasene's, Jesus is approached by a man with unclean spirits that had been living among the tombs. Alone. Ostracized. Outcast. Trapped by whatever it is that wreaked havoc on his body. Yet, Jesus sets the man free and sends him back home to tell his friends in the Decapolis, Gentile territory, about how much the Lord had done for him, and the mercy shown upon him.

Our healings today involve two completely different individuals. The daughter of Jairus, a leader of the synagogue and the unnamed woman. Jairus was most likely financially well off given his role. The unnamed woman clearly left in destitute by what may have been unscrupulous practices of so-called physicians. Jairus' daughter just 12 years of age. The woman, clearly older as she had been suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years making her ritually unclean and taking a great risk entering a large crowd in an attempt to touch Jesus' cloak and be healed. The daughter has an advocate in her father. The woman has none.

Yet these differences seemingly make no difference to Jesus. He heals both. He touches both. One bleeding and one presumed to have died. The result of his healing touch thus would have made Jesus too ritually impure. These healings are more than just cures. They are a restoration to community and life. They are affirmation that even the most vulnerable in society are beloved and precious. They are a transformation from fear to peace, death to life.

Jesus heals. He saves the disciples from the stormy seas. He sets free a demon-possessed man. He raises a daughter to life. He restores a bleeding woman back into the life of her community and heals her of an ailment that has plagued her for many years. These stories coming on the heels of parables about what the kingdom of God looks like are a further revelation of that kingdom and they are a further revelation into who Jesus is.

One aspect of these miracles and healing stories is the revelation that nothing or no one stands outside of the healing, saving power of Jesus. There is nothing that is out of bounds or off limits. No evil spirit. No storm. No ailment. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. In a world

in which it seems we are quick to cast judgement or be judged, this news of great joy is healing in and of itself.

Jesus heals us; but that healing does not always come in the ways we want. While healing can indeed be a physical or mental cure from an ailment, it also implies spiritual healing. Restoration with God. Freedom from sin.

Passages about miraculous physical healings, or cures, can be difficult because, for instance, we know one child may make a complete recovery from an ailment leaving loved ones in a state of joy, there is another child that succumbs to similar ailments leaving a family in the grips of loss and grief. Both families may have had faith the size of a mustard seed and then some. Both families may have spent hours in prayer. Both families may have had access to similar treatments. Yet, two different outcomes were had. It is clear to see Jesus' healing in the first instance, but where is Jesus' healing in the second one as a child's body is placed in the ground? It is not always easy to see, but often faith and healing come after the fact such as when a family learns to remember with gratitude the child they have lost and trust in the promise their child will rise to new life in Christ.¹

I suppose we can all recollect situations in our lives in which we encountered the healing power of God. Take a moment and think about where the healing power and presence of Christ has been experienced in your life. (Pause) Some of these instances surely were obvious and apparent immediately while others may have not been recognized until weeks, months or even years later.

Our Monday small group spent time in discussion on this topic earlier this week; especially, in those instances in which a physical cure never came. Examples of finding gratitude even amidst a terminal illness were shared. The experience of peace in the face of fear and the unknown. The overarching reach of God continuing faithfully to find one lost sheep and return them into the fold of grace and mercy.

When I look back upon my own life there are so many moments of healing such as truly encountering the good news of Jesus Christ for the first time. The weight lifted off my shoulders knowing I did not have to be perfect or live up to everyone else's expectations. Being able to approach God just as I was. Or encountering the healing presence of Christ draw near as a group of colleagues stood around me and prayed for me and my wife prior to a major surgery bringing a real calmness to a most anxious period of our lives. Or the gift of medicines, physicians, counselors, and friends coming alongside to ease the isolation and burden that comes from anxiety and depression. Or having watching God's precious sons and daughters experience yet another diagnosis they prayed would turn out differently, a phone call in the night we all hope will never come, a painful separation, a sudden loss, how often have I found myself alone, frustrated, even angry with God and wondering where is this Christ who heals us

found? Yet, time and time again I am comforted through these moments of prayer. The good news of Jesus yet again breaks forth. Through the faith instilled in us via the Holy Spirit, fear, anger, and despair give way to the presence and promises of God in Christ Jesus. That whisper and breath of the Spirit blowing through our lives is heard and felt.

Martin Luther certainly found himself amidst many storms. Excommunication, being deemed a heretic, a bounty on his head, fear, doubt, angst, and so much more. While clearly Luther's Spirit-filled encounter with the abundance of God's grace that set him free from the inability to please God, set things right, and fully enter the fullness of Christ's presence brought immeasurable healing to an aching soul, he also found great wholeness in a return to the life-giving waters of baptism where he frequently was noted as saying, "I am baptized." A recollection of the promise that every day in those waters we are reminded of the fact we are God's beloved. We are joined to Christ's death, which also implies we are joined to his resurrection. We are signed and sealed by the Holy Spirit with the cross of Christ. We are forgiven. Each day we are made anew and set aside to join the mission of God and go and tell the world about the unending love, grace, and mercy of God. We are sent to share our stories and encounters of how Christ heals us.

I cannot help but read this passage and think of the film *Gran Torino* starring Clint Eastwood whose character, Walt Kowalski, has just endured the loss of his wife. He is grumpy, bitter, and alone. He is bound by prejudices as the neighborhood around him changes as a Hmong family moves in next door and more Hmong families begin occupying surrounding areas. A priest often visits in attempts to ease his pain and move him beyond his present state. As the movie progresses, Walt establishes a relationship with his new neighbors. Slowly, he is transformed from his loneliness, anger, bitterness, prejudices, and seemingly callous heart into a man who is once again able to give, love, and experience joy. Overcome his prejudices and pain. Given thanks for the gift of his wife and their marriage. The healing power of Jesus yet again makes itself known.

Wherever this morning finds you. Whatever healing it is you need. Please know that nothing stands outside of Jesus' power to heal us. Nothing is in the way of our ability to approach him and lay upon him whatever it is we hold in our heart. Jesus heals us! Where have you experienced the healing touch of Jesus and who can you share that story with this week?

ⁱ *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume VIII*; 1995 Abingdon Press; p.591.