

## Sermon for October 25, 2009

By Deb Lewis

The reading this morning is from 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 Jesus, 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.

### **A HEALING TOUCH, A LIFE-BRINGING WORD**

Good morning, friends! It is a delight to be with you this morning! But if you are visiting here for the first time this morning, I invite you back to hear our Pastor May Jane who should be back here by next Sunday.

Most or all of us who regularly worship here know that our individual Disciples congregations relate to the general offices of the Christian Church-Disciples of Christ in Indianapolis, Indiana. You probably also know that every two years, Disciples all across the United States and Canada meet for General Assembly, and that Pastor Mary Jane was at General Assembly in early August. The theme for General Assembly this year was from Revelation 22:2 - "And the leaves of the trees shall be for the healing of the nations." That theme complements our new Disciples' identity statement - "We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world." This fall, Pastor Mary Jane has used this as the theme for her sermons, and we've learned and thought about wholeness in the context of how we relate to God, to the Bible and to one another.

So, as I thought about what I might say to you this morning, healing and wholeness in our fragmented world, and sometimes in our fragmented lives, seemed pretty obvious. As we think about healing and our text of this morning, there are a couple of things I should say right up front. First, I'm sure that for some of us, one of the first images that may come to mind is a scene in a charismatic, faith-healing church where a person who seemingly can't walk suddenly starts dancing across the chancel or a person with terminal cancer claims a full cure. I've never actually visited any of those churches, but maybe some of you have. We've all probably seen such a charismatic minister of TV, at least - whether in reality or in parody. I honestly don't know what to make of such a church or the minister's message because it is outside of my experience and outside of the science of biology that is my day-job. So that's NOT what I'll be talking about this morning, and it will be good if we can set aside such mysteries for the next few minutes.

And second, you may be thinking that I'm going to focus the message this morning on listing the various kinds of physical, emotional and spiritual hurts that come our way, and that we'll leave here just bummed out by it all. Well, even though our text for this morning includes two stories of woundedness - a woman's physical ailment and a grieving father - there are also two happy endings. So let's just admit right up front that to be human is to be wounded in some way. And some good sermons can probably be preached, as well as some good counseling offered, that can help us deal with the pain and hurts and their resulting scars, and we may need to examine if and how we need help for dealing with them. But that's not the theme of the message this morning, either. So instead of our getting out a piece of paper and listing where our wounds come from, let's instead think of how we can, in the words of author Henri Nouwen, become a wounded healer.

So then, just what is a healing touch? Let's look at the centerpiece story first - the story of the woman in the crowd who the scripture describes as having suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years. In this woman's story of encountering Jesus, just who is it who does the touching? We see that it is Jesus who asks, "Who touched me?" Those words about scared the woman to death! Yet there was a huge crowd around them both. Can you picture the scene? - the dust rising from the dirt road, the jostling crowd, all wanting a look at this man whom they had heard so much about. And Jairus begging Jesus to hurry, because his daughter was dying! Can you imagine the cascade of the woman's emotions - from hope to joy to fear - in less than

a minute! Now the trembling woman had to confess that it was she who had touched him! She had come to Jesus in her vulnerability – couldn't he see that? Would Jesus be angry? Would the affects of the healing now disappear and this sense of well-being after all this time just vanish? Can a miracle be undone? But now it was time for honesty – in her desperation and vulnerability, she had come to Jesus as a last resort. Maybe, maybe he can heal me! No, her trust must have been stronger than that, because Jesus replied that it wasn't him, but her own faith that made her well. And Jesus didn't single her out to humiliate her, but rather to praise her for her faith. As I mentioned earlier, I can't begin to explain how this happened, nor why this isn't some magic formula that works the same way today. We know that no matter how earnestly a person prays, no matter how strong the faith, or how good a life the person is living, often this just doesn't change things – the cancer isn't cured or the miracle doesn't happen.

Yet healing does happen. Sometimes in our own weakness and vulnerability, we are able to build a supportive, healing relationship with another person. So in our story this morning, the woman, outcast and weakened from her disease, having endured much and having spent all she had, comes to Jesus with her last shred of faith. Now, having received power of healing just by touching the hem of his cloak, she is also able to be noticed, to be seen and singled out by Jesus, and to hear the love in his voice as he said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace and be healed." Her healing was way more than just physical. She knew that she was no longer shunned under the law, but she was now a woman of worth! And she was claimed by Jesus as family, as daughter, as loved and accepted . . .

Sometimes, we get to experience the grace of such moments. And in those times, we accept our woundedness and seek healing in a new way – by our relationships and finding those opportunities in which we ourselves can become the healer. We know that Jesus was also a wounded healer! He knew the pain of disappointment that his message wasn't being heard and understood. He had suffered the scorn of religious leaders and grieved losses like the death of John the Baptist. Yet he used his energy to recognize the opportunities in which he could become the healer. By his own wounds he suffered with the people – compassionately. Did you know that the Latin meaning of the word "compassion" means "suffering with"?

Okay, in our first of the two stories, we have seen a woman take an initiative for her own healing by her faith, but this is a story set in the middle of a different story. The bracketing story tells us that there is a father seeking out Jesus on behalf of his beloved and very ill daughter. This man Jairus is in a way the opposite extreme of the woman in the first story. Jairus is a respected religious leader in the synagogue, while the woman came to Jesus bankrupt and suffering from one of those kinds of diseases that made her an outcast. Yet both have looked to Jesus for healing and have sought him out in their vulnerability. Jairus left his synagogue – this place of prayer and worship – to seek a rebel outsider and beg Jesus to come and lay his hands on his daughter so that she might live. In compassion, Jesus went with him. But while Jesus had stopped to talk with and praise the woman in our first story, messengers came from Jairus' home to tell him that his daughter had died. Well, okay, one person is healed and another dies. That's how our world works, isn't it? But wait! Jesus shows us something different! He called on Jairus to hang onto his faith, even as they walked through the throngs of

mourners who were weeping and wailing. Jesus took the little girl's hand in his own, and said to her, "Little girl, get up!" And with those commanding, life-giving words, immediately she got up and was able to walk and to eat.

Two neat stories, huh?! But that was so long ago – in a time when miracles seemed more the norm than they do today. Modern science doesn't make room for someone who has truly died to be brought back to life. And Jesus isn't here to take us by the hand and speak special words directly to us. Do these stories really tell us anything about our lives in this day and age?

Well, hopefully by now we agree that one thing we have in common is that, in some way, we're all wounded, and each of us at one time or another needs healing. I've also suggested the possibility that by our wounds and vulnerability, through them, compassion is born and we can become wounded healers.

We know that Jesus wasn't living compassionately among the people just to be a miracle-worker and teacher just for the relatively few folks he was able to encounter and interact with. Otherwise, we'd likely never have even heard of him. Instead, we know that he was launching a new way of being, a new way of living in God's realm. Healings weren't happening just to show how powerful Jesus was, but to inspire faith and to point the way to a loving, healing God. Jesus was starting a movement – a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world – and calling people 2000 years ago, as well as people of today to follow and be part of the movement.

This movement points out that while we live in the world as it is, we can imagine the world as it could be. When we join such a vision with our woundedness that knows healing, our faith, our compassion and our working together, we can bring God's realm into being yet again in a new place and a new way. We've surely all experienced physical touch that helped with healing. When I visited my parents recently, my Dad reminded me how I had rubbed lotion on his back at 3 a.m. following one of his surgeries, and how good and relaxing that had felt. This moment was special beyond easing his pain – a nurse's touch just wouldn't have been the same as that of a daughter expressing her love like that.

But more broadly, we know our health care system here in the US needs a healing touch and life-giving word, so let's boldly speak out so that all are insured and have access to health care. We know that the economic downturn and lost jobs are breeding hopelessness and violence, so let's reach out with positive instead of negative words as we are able. We know that peace is needed, along with justice, in our own nation and in many countries around the world. We know that refugees and immigrants need a place of healing to call "home". We can also speak up to educate each other, like as I've learned from someone here how buying fair trade coffee helps coffee growers to be part of a sustainable market.

We also know that many who wear the name of Christian would say, "This world is not my home, I'm just-a-passin' through . . ." – and use that sentiment to avoid taking care of this earth

that we all call home! Let's consider the impacts of our human activities on all of life. Let's use the earth's bounty more responsibly so that it doesn't become the earth's scarcity.

Yes, let's claim and live into the new identity statement, "We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world." Go provide a healing touch. Go speak a life-giving word. Amen.