

Healing More Than Just a Person

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Jesus has just arrived in the town, he has just gotten out of the boat and people are crowding around him. Suddenly the leader of the synagogue falls at Jesus' feet and cries out, "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." Obviously, this man has heard about the healings that Jesus has done in other towns and believes that Jesus can heal his daughter. But let's look at how radical this man's behavior is for his culture. Here is a Jewish leader of the community, he would be wealthy and have influence in the town, definitely not someone on the margins, who falls in the dust at Jesus' feet. And Jesus without a word proceeds to go with him to his house.

As they are walking and the crowd presses in on him, Jesus feels power flowing out from him. Someone has touched him! When Jesus asks who touched him, a woman comes in fear and trembling, and falls in the dust at Jesus feet. A woman who has been bleeding for 12 years has touched Jesus. This woman had no business touching Jesus; she should not even have been in the crowd around him. According to the Jewish purity laws found in Lev. 15, *If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean. Whoever touches [anything that she has touched] shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening.*

According to the purity laws, the woman is an outcast of society and should be calling Jesus from a distance, not pushing through a crowd and touching him! The only thing worse would be if Jesus touches a dead person. No wonder she came in fear and trembling before Jesus. She is living the words of the psalmist this morning, *Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice; let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.* Jesus instead of condemning her gives her His peace, his love and tells her that her faith in God has healed her of her disease. The woman is made whole in body, mind and spirit and returned to her community. As in our psalm this morning, the woman *waited for the LORD; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope.* Her hope was in the Lord and Jesus perceived her trust and faith in Him.

Now Jesus, ritually unclean by Jewish law, continues to the synagogue leader's home. At the house he tells the mourners to leave, and takes the child's parents and Peter, James and John into the house. When Jesus says, *"Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."* the words for dead and sleeping that he uses mean the same thing. The child is dead. In the New Testament, however, death is the sleep from which one will awaken to new life in Christ. Then harking back to Elijah's rising of the widow's son, Jesus takes the dead child's hand and tells her "Little girl, get up!" Then as Jesus will do at his own resurrection, he tells the parents to give her something to eat. Jesus has now restored not only the child's life, but the family is once again whole. This is a story of how faith in Jesus brings wholeness to creation.

People, including biblical scholars, usually perceive this passage as two separate healings, but I'm going to present an interpretation of this passage that binds them together as one continuous story of Jesus' ability to bring wholeness out of suffering.

While studying for my Master's degree at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio, I took a course on the Synoptic Gospels. One of my classmates was a gynecologist. When we came to this story in Mark, he told us that at childbirth there is a condition where the mother would continue to bleed for years. So the woman in the story could be the child's mother who has been ostracized from her family and community for 12 years. The family would have spent their money to help her, but at that time there was not much that could be done for her. As a Jewish man, and especially as a leader of the synagogue, Jairus would have been commanded by the Jewish law to have his wife leave her home and live on the outskirts of the community. Keep in mind this is the Jewish culture 2,000 years ago, not today. Now their 12-year-old daughter is dying. Jesus, after healing the woman, who could be the child's mother, then restores the child to life. Jesus restores the mother to health and gives the daughter new life. Jesus has brought wholeness to the individuals, the family and the community. Creation has been restored, God's kingdom has come in their midst.

One thing to keep in mind, is that while Jesus physically healed the people in this passage, not all healings bring physical healing. Sometimes the healing may be of a relationship or a person's mental, emotional or spiritual state, but not physical. Sometimes the final physical healing can only come after death, when we are restored to wholeness in Christ. When we were on the Cape one of our parishioners became terminally ill. She and I became very close over the two years of her illness. When we arrived at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Orleans, MA. the doctors had given her 3 months to live. She had grandchildren that lived in CA. that she rarely saw and that never attended church. At the end of her illness, as she lay in her hospital bed, I came to give her communion on Sunday after church. Her daughter and grandchildren were there with her. We did the communion service together standing around the bed, holding hands and everyone received communion. (We did have to instruct the children on what to do.) Shirley watched the grandchildren receive communion with tears in her eyes. Afterwards she told me what a blessing it was to have them with her and to have the chance to share Christ's body and blood with her grandchildren, something that probably would not have happened otherwise. She received that peace that only God can give in the midst of her suffering.

At the 10:00 service today we will bring a new member into the household of God, the gospel this morning reminds us that in baptism we are buried with Christ in his death and raised to new life in Him. Through baptism we are reborn by the Holy Spirit, cleansed from sin and continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Jesus healed the woman, the outcast, the person others in the community wanted nothing to do with. And, like the outcast woman and Jairus we proclaim in the Nicene Creed that we believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord so that, like the outcast woman, we too can have the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love the Lord, and the gift of joy and wonder in all God's works. Amen.