

Year B, July 1, 2018
6 Pentecost (Proper 8)
Christ Church, Mexia

Today, we are reminded of two separate incidents of healing by Jesus. The healing of the daughter of Jairus is more like the other stories in the gospel where Jesus takes an active part in the healing. It does have the distinction of being a case where everyone thinks the daughter is dead, but Jesus takes her hand and bids her to stand up. She does and walks about, obviously not dead, and healed. This is the kind of story with which we are more familiar. But a funny thing happens on the way to Jairus' house. Well, maybe interesting is a better adjective than funny.

Jesus is walking through the crowd and a woman in desperate need of being cured reaches out and touches his garment surreptitiously – she thinks. Why she thought that such a casual encounter would cure her isn't clear, but she is immediately cured. Now she thought no one would be the wiser, but Jesus sensed what had happened. And he wants to know who touched him. No big deal, right? Not exactly.

This woman had been hemorrhaging for 12 years. She had tried every cure, spent all her money – to no avail. Under the law and custom of the day, she should have sought cure at the Temple in Jerusalem through ritual sacrifice. But one Catch 22; because of her condition she would have been considered unclean and thus, she could not gain entrance to the Temple, even to the Court of Women. Also, second Catch 22, because she is unclean, Jesus could not touch her physically without him becoming ritually unclean as well. Of course, we know from other scripture that this would not deter him at all, but it was obviously on her mind. And she would have needed a man to intercede for her anyway.

She has one chance, and she has to act in the way she thinks will work best for all. But now she is "outed," so to speak. Everyone, the people who had most likely shunned her because of her condition, now know what she has done. No wonder she is scared – she has done so many things wrong under the law! People of the day would have already assumed that she had sinned against God, that is why she suffered, especially without a cure being possible. She is an outcast of society. And now the final humiliation. What will Jesus do? She throws herself at his feet in total submission.

Of course, Jesus reacts as we, knowing what we know, would expect him to act. Society has pushed this woman down; she is not only a woman, apparently without male relatives, but also an unclean person, and now poor as well. It doesn't get much worse than that in the first century! But Jesus raises her up!

He calls her “daughter.” Daughter - family. Confirms that she has indeed been healed and invites her to go in peace.

She has been healed by her faith and touching his garment, not by his actions, his invitation, like the daughter of Jairus. And that may make us wonder why everyone who calls on God, who prays for healing, isn't cured. And it is true, some people are not cured of their disease, some people die despite their prayers. Is there something wrong? Do they lack the faith of this woman? Does God have something against those people? No-o-o-o. As I've said in the past, sometimes the outcomes of our prayers are something other than what we are expecting, what we visualize will happen.

The Rev. Michael Lindvall, a Presbyterian minister, tells a story that may shed some light on this situation: “I have a friend,” he says, “a man of deep faith, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease when he was still in his fifties. He and his wife prayed that he might be healed. Twenty years later, he is in the declining stages of the disease. Nevertheless, he once told me that his prayers had been answered. He said in all sincerity, ‘I *have* been healed, not of Parkinson's disease, but I have been healed of my fear of Parkinson's disease.’”

In my classes regarding problem solving, I often remind students that problems create something – symptoms. And when we go to our doctor, what we describe to him/her are the symptoms. Now the doctor could treat the symptoms – the fever, the pain, the nausea, whatever – but that doesn't solve/cure the problem. We don't always know what the problem is. Therefore, it is usually difficult to solve. We may not know precisely what to ask in our prayers. Sometimes we may ask for the wrong things. This is why we generally pray for healing, rather than cure. We leave it up to God to do what God thinks should be done. Like our doctor, God has more expertise, more knowledge, of what should be done – what is most important.

I think one of the important lessons for today is that we often define people by their condition, their status, and we marginalize them, we dehumanize them, we distance ourselves from them. But the Jesus we profess to follow always affirms people, affirms them with love and acceptance. No one is ever far from God, unloved by God. Jesus doesn't just cure people, he restores them to their rightful place in community. So, if any of you feel unworthy, unloved, forgotten, unforgiven, know that you only have to reach out to Jesus. Because Jesus loves you and wishes Shalom for you. God may not act exactly as you wish for God to act, but God will act. God will be there!

In closing, let me leave you with one final, related thought from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “He who can no longer listen to his brother will soon no longer be listening to God either.” My constant prayer is that we will be more like Jesus in our daily lives.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.