

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Two Healings"

Scripture: Mark 5:21-43, Psalm 130

Opening Hymn: O God, our help in ages past 330

Closing Hymn: Sent forth by your blessing 775

Children's Hymn: We are marching (with Xhosa lyrics) 639

Choruses: Jesus, You are the Vine

Rev. Steve Filyk

Based in part on "Reaching out to Jesus" sermon given at Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church on July 5, 2015

February 2, 2020

4th Sunday after the Epiphany

Communion Sunday

Who do you turn to when you're desperate?
Who do you run to when you're in trouble?

When the workplace has turned toxic...
When you're arguing with your spouse...
When you're seeing a specialist and getting no clear results...

Now if you share these troubles at coffee-time
I'm sure you'll get lots of different suggestions.

Someone might recommend a counsellor.
Another might tell you to call your mother.
You might get a number of a good lawyer,
Or an invitation to go skiing at Sun Peaks.

Of course, there is an off chance
That someone might suggest that you pray about it,
And promise to pray for you as well.

But prayer is probably not your first response.

Even in the church, we're not always convinced
That God is really concerned with our daily challenges.
Or that if God is concerned,
That God is willing to relieve the burden and the pain.

But if you believe that God is uninterested or unconcerned
you should really reconsider today's Gospel lesson.

Today's story,
Which is actually two stories,
Deals with two people in desperate situations.

In the first story Jesus is approached by a man named Jairus.
Jairus is a prominent man in the community:
He is described as a synagogue leader.

We are told that "when he saw Jesus,
he fell to his knees [begging],
"My dear daughter is at death's door.
Come and lay hands on her
so she will get well and live."ⁱ

It is important to note
That it would have been strange someone from the establishment
To throw himself at the feet of a newcomer
Who was outspoken in his criticism of other teachers.

Can you imagine a Conservative Member of Parliament
Asking a Liberal MP
for some help in his dispute with Revenue Canada?
Or a Liberal MP asking that Conservative MP for the same?

But Jairus is desperate.

Most parents can identify with this desperation.
Most of us have at least one story of taking a child
On a late-night run to 'Emergency'.

We are told that the synagogue leader Jairus humbles himself,
And brings his concern to Jesus.
Jesus hears this concern and goes with him.

But this story isn't quickly resolved.

There is an interruption.
Someone has touched Jesus' coat.

Here we encounter an unnamed woman
With a medical condition,
An ongoing problem with bleeding.

Not only is this a physical trauma,
But the ongoing hemorrhaging has wounded her
both financially and socially

She has spent all her resources searching for a solution
But none of her doctors have been successful.
Because of the ongoing bleeding
She is considered ritually unclean
As is anyone who touches her.

PAUSE

We've been hearing a lot about the Coronavirus.
Imagine you told a friend that you were worried
about being infected.

You'd soon find that few people were interested
In visiting you or going out for lunch!
Now imagine that isolation stretching on for 12 years.
That's what this woman was living with!

Two people approach Jesus for healing.

One was esteemed, likely well-to-do, and certainly male.
The other was female, outcast, and poor.

If coming to Jesus was an act of humility for Jairus,
Coming to Jesus was an act of audacity for the woman.

Recognizing her own state, being ritually impure,
she reaches out to Jesus,
but by stealth.

As our lesson tell us:

“She slipped in from behind and touched his robe.
[For] She was thinking to herself,
“If I can put a finger on his robe, I can get well.”ⁱⁱ

She takes the risk of reaching out to Jesus
And this has a profound effect on her life.

We are told that the moment the woman touched Jesus
“the flow of blood dried up.
She could feel the change
and knew her plague was over and done with.”ⁱⁱⁱ

When Jesus discovers what has happened,
Instead of getting angry,
He commends her for her daring behavior.

Jesus restores her not only physically, but socially,
Addressing her as ‘daughter’ —
One who has a place in the family.

An unnamed woman reaches out to Jesus
And is instantly healed.
But Jairus has to wait for healing a little longer.

His journey with Jesus is interrupted
by the woman’s healing.
And in the intervening time his daughter dies.

But Jesus encourages Jairus' faith,
Jesus encourages Jairus' persistence.
Even when others tell him to give up.

Our lesson tells us
That after Jesus brought Jairus and his wife
Into their dead daughter's room,

"He clasped the girl's hand and said... "Little girl, get up."
[And] At that, she was up and walking around!

In their desperation two people reach out to Jesus.
And they find the wholeness they are seeking.

And we are reminded that Jesus brings us life.

PAUSE

But despite these stories,
Despite these and other stories
We don't always reach out to Jesus...
Even when we are desperate.

Some of us lack the humility.
Some of us lack the audacity.
Some of us have been "burned".

What I mean by being “burned” is that is at some point
We’ve asked God to intervene in our own lives,
And when it didn’t happen as we expected,
We became convinced that
God doesn’t do healings anymore.^{iv}

But can we put this sort of limitation on God,
Especially when the Bible teaches us otherwise?

Just because God chooses not to heal on one occasion,
Does not mean that God refuses to answer these prayers.

John Wimber, a founder of the Vineyard movement
Is noted to have said: “At one point,
we never used to pray for anyone to be healed
and nobody got healed.

Then, we started praying for everyone to be healed,
and now, sometimes people get healed.”^v

Sometimes God works quietly in our lives.
Bringing wholeness through ordinary or natural means.
But sometimes God heals
in unexpected and extraordinary ways.

This past week at Alpha we were looking at the question:
“Does God heal today?”

One of the stories that was shared was the testimony
Of Quincy Bellot, a Marine with the British Army,
who himself had started attending an Alpha Study.

In his words:

“This pain started twelve years ago.
After joining the Royal Marines it became extremely bad.

The cartilage below the kneecap was completely gone.
This injury has caused a massive setback in life.

Last year was the worst when the ligaments and the tendons were torn
and the kneecap went in a forty-five-degree angle.
It has been a long and painful journey.
I could not sit or stand for too long.

‘Cut a long story short, I decided to try God and try Alpha.
I got back from the Alpha weekend
and agreed to [attend a prayer service] after much hesitation...

When someone said [a word of knowledge] about [my] cartilage issue,
I took the sharpest breath I ever took.

I agreed to be prayed for.

I felt God moving in my knee.

I dropped on my knees to test it and remarkably no pain.

It's just miraculous.

I went for a run last night...
it was the first time after a very long time
I haven't had any pain.

God is real [Quincy continues].
If [God] can do this after such a long time
there is nothing I am restricted to.”^{vi}

Sometimes God works quietly in our lives.
Bringing wholeness through ordinary or natural means.
Sometimes God heals in unexpected and extraordinary ways.

And sometimes God provides us with the hope and perseverance
We need to wait for the new age that God is establishing
Where his kingdom of health and peace will reign in fullness.

It is interesting to consider that not everyone in Judea
was healed during Jesus' ministry.^{vii}
Even those who were healed
would one day fall sick and die.

Healings in Jesus' time and today
Serve as signs of God's love and compassion for us;
signs of the good future God has planned
that we hear about in the book of Revelation.

A time when:

“He’ll wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death is gone for good—tears gone,
crying gone, pain gone—
all the first order of things gone.”^{viii}

Maybe that’s where most of us Presbyterians

Pin our hopes:
God’s final redemption of all things.

But that doesn’t mean

We are left to struggle on our own today.

I wonder what would happen

if we reached out to Jesus in our times of desperation,
If we approached God in humility and audacity
We might also experience something
of the astonishing mercies of God.

But that’s a modern ‘me only’ dream.

What would happen if we reached out
On behalf of our friends and neighbors
Asking for God’s healing to be poured out on them?

In the Presbyterian Church in Canada’s *Book of Common Worship*

There is a rite, an order
For wholeness and healing.

The order includes prayers and blessings.

Following the Biblical example

It includes an opportunity for anointing with oil

And the laying on of hands.

In my entire ministry I've only used it once.

But I'm hoping that this will change,

That in our desperation,

We will come to God for help.

So if you want prayer,

Better yet, if you need prayer,

I will remain at the front after the service.

Along with a couple elders

We can seek God's healing together.

Amen.

ⁱ Mark 5:22-23 MSG

ⁱⁱ Mark 5:27-28 MSG

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark 5:29 MSG

^{iv} See Robert Longman "Cessationism: Have Signs Ceased?" <http://www.spirithome.com/cessationism.html>

^v Quoted by Nickey Gumbel in "Does God Heal Today?" *Alpha*

^{vi} Quincy Bellot "It's Just Miraculous" *Bible in One Year*

bibleinoneyear.org/bioy/commentary/1295+&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca

^{vii} In Mark 6:5 we are told that Jesus couldn't do much work in his own hometown because of their lack of faith.

^{viii} Rev 21:1-5a MSG