

## Healing and the Church's Ministry

The Reverend Harold A. Jackson, Jr. San Dimas Community Church, United Church of Christ  
June 28, 2009 Mark 5: 24-34

Last year on the fourth Sunday of Pentecost, I preached to you on the subject "Jesus, Faith, and Healing." The scripture lesson came from the ninth chapter of Matthew and had the same themes that this fourth Sunday of Pentecost scripture has in Mark. In order not to repeat myself, I at first thought that I should preach from the Old Testament lection suggested for today instead of Mark; but, I decided to continue with my 2008 sermon theme: health care for all.

It seems that when you pick up the newspaper, listen to the radio, or turn on the television news the subject of health care is constantly being mentioned. Just a few days ago, President Obama and those concerned about health care were assembled in the east wing of the White House. Usually the debate is about who should get it and how much will it cost. The politicians have drawn their lines in the sand. Our question is, however, "What should be the church's ministry concerning God's people?"

I look at health care as a part of the ministry of Jesus Christ. His ministry was about healing. If it was about healing, then the church—which is the body of Christ—should be concerned about health care.

Well, what about that? What about the church's ministry when it comes to health care and healing? Indeed, are health care and healing really a part of the church's ministry? Is health care and healing a part of the church's ministry and we really don't want them to be? If it is, it may cause us problems with our faith because we will have to step out of our small narrow worlds and deal with the "other"—the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and O yes, the sick. These my friends are not only health issues, but are also faith issues.

In our scripture, we have two stories of healing and faith. We find that the act of healing cannot take place without the belief that it *can* take place. Many people read these stories and only see them as Jesus performing miracles. They never stop to look at the deeper meaning of what the stories reveal. Theirs is a superficial faith. They read the Bible as they would read a book of Aesop's fables. They never understand that the Bible is a textbook of instructions and directions concerning life and its meaning.

Christ Jesus was concerned about life. He was concerned that people would live their lives in a meaningful way. He was so concerned that he gave his life so that we could have abundant life. A faith-driven health care program can provide all the ingredients that promise an abundant life. Mark recorded the deeds of Jesus so that we, the followers of Christ, can understand more fully God's plan for our lives and the lives of people around us.

In our first story, Mark tells us of Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, who comes to Jesus with such faith that if Jesus placed his hand on his daughter, who is near death, the girl would be healed. In the Gospel of Matthew, we are told that the child is already dead. But, whether the child is about to die or is already dead is not important. The emphasis should not be on the condition of the child, but on the faith of the father. O, what a faith! It is easy to have faith that one can be healed, but it is difficult to believe that one can be raised from her deathbed. Indeed, this girl was on her deathbed.

It seems that Mark is playing with our minds in relating this story. Although we are told that Jairus wants his daughter to get well, the story implies that Jairus senses that his daughter is dead. What he really wants for his daughter is resurrection. Therefore, with this the first of two stories, we are asked to envision the power of God through Jesus Christ. We are asked to believe that Jesus is able to raise the dead. Would it not be better to tell of some of Jesus' other miracles before taking on the probability that the dead can be raised—and live? If we are the followers of Christ—like we say we are—then where is our faith?

But, I am getting ahead of myself. The gospel writer toys with us in relating this story. He tells us that a great crowd is gathered around Jesus as he proceeds to the house of Jairus. I imagine that in the crowd were people who wanted Jesus to heal them and also people who were curious as to whether he could heal a girl on her deathbed. In the midst of that story, Mark introduces us to a woman who has been ill for twelve years. Thus we have two stories in one. The writer is excited to let us know that no matter what are the issues pressing upon God, there is still time to be concerned with the health problems of each individual—health care is for all. Jesus is concerned and takes time to heal. He believes that health care is for all. But wait, let's finish our first story.

I believe that Mark saw the event of Jairus going to Jesus as significant. We know that the people had said the girl was dead, but Jesus lifted her hand and she arose. Yes, it is significant that Jesus raised the girl from the dead, but even more significant, it offers to us a parable.

The parable is that we may be like the ruler's daughter, dead. We are dead to the world about us, unconcerned with the problems of our brothers and sisters, and comfortable dwelling in the shadow of death, estranged from God. Yet, the parable says that we do not need to remain dead. We can be delivered from death and be resurrected into a new life. In other words, our lives can be changed. We can become the caring people God wants us to be.

This is a resurrection story. It is significant because no rising of the dead has been previously reported in this gospel. Mark is not concerned with Christians who are asleep to the possibilities of life that God has to offer. He is not concerned with the deadness of the girl. He is concerned that people awake from their lethargy and arise to the newness of life.

The girl arose because of the great faith manifested by her father. Because of the father's faith, Jesus was able to heal.

Now let's get back to our story in a story. The woman who has been ill for twelve years has an issue of blood. She is hemorrhaging. Because of her issue of blood, she is considered an unclean woman.

It is important to know what this means. The menstrual period of a woman was considered a tome of uncleanness. Evidently, the woman's issue of blood went beyond the regular time of menstruation, and in a male-dominated, law regulated culture, the woman was given the stigma of being unclean. In Leviticus 15: 25-27, it explicitly states that if a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, excluding the time of her impurity, or if there is an issue of blood beyond her days of impurity, then she will be declared unclean. All that she touches and all who come into contact with her will likewise be declared unclean. She was absolutely shut off from the worship of God and fellowship with her peers.

Therefore, there was a desperate need for this woman to be rescued from her isolation and humiliation. In the crowd, she reached out and touched the hem of his robe. She felt lost in the crowd. If anyone knew that she was unclean, she would have been punished for committing a sinful act—associating with “clean” folk. She was in a crowd, but as William Barclay puts it, “For Jesus no one is ever lost in a crowd, because Jesus is like God.” God is concerned about everyone—each one counts. The world may not care, but God cares. A poor woman who is isolated and humiliated by the world becomes a part of a fellowship that is greater than what the world can give. No more isolation. No more being lost in an uncaring world. No more humiliation—she can walk with her head up because God cares.

Jesus being like God sensed in his whole being the distress of the woman. In her, he saw and felt a faith that surpassed all understanding and the touch that was given to him was given back to her. He touched her with his words, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace . . .”

The words, “Somebody touched me” are very significant. A woman who is despised because she lives outside the religious law by being unclean is a nobody in her isolation. However, she interfaces with Christ. In that moment, she becomes a “somebody.” So it is with us all. At some time in our lives, we were among the nobodies, but because of an act of faith, because we believed our lives could be changed, because we felt a sincere need, we took a leap of faith over the abyss of nothingness and became somebodies. A nobody to a somebody because we dared to reach out and touch.

These two stories are stories concerning the absolute necessity of faith. Many times people want God to do things for them, but they don't have the necessary faith that permits God to do what they want done. One must have an absolute faith. No matter how many prayers are raised to heaven nothing will happen unless faith is absolute.

I think that these two stories serve as patterns for the Christian church and its ministry. The threefold ministry of the work of Jesus was, preaching, teaching, and healing. The church has already accepted the task of this ministry—sometimes it does it well and sometimes not too well. Its main focus is preaching and teaching. It sees itself as the herald of God continuing to bring the message bidding people to action through proclamation and example of living. Where we seem to fall is in the work of healing.

The good news that Jesus brought did not stop with words. When we search the scriptures, we find that Jesus spent more time in healing than he did in talking about God. It seems to me that the church has a duty to do likewise. Our Christian words must be turned into deeds of Christian love. That is where we as true followers of Jesus Christ come in.

It is incumbent upon the church to have an absolute faith. We have the authority from Jesus Christ himself. It is through his death and resurrection that we have been ordained to carry on his work. Our problem is that many of us as a body of Christ-followers do not believe that we can heal. Perhaps, we do not pray with sincere enough hearts demonstrating that we have a special mission. I don't know the whole answer of our impotency, but I do believe in healing.

I believe that if a body of sincere Christians gets itself together as a fellowship with an absolute faith God is able; then greater miracles than we have seen will be accomplished. We may not make the blind see, or cause the lame to walk, or even cure a person with cancer. However, we can participate in a movement where health care is open to all, not because of a person's status or how much it will cost but because we are commanded by God to care and to love. We need to show this nation, through our Christian witness, that the benefits of health care should be opened to all. Alongside the suggestions that are being put forth, the public option that the president is pushing should definitely be on the table. The questions are: What would Jesus have us do concerning the welfare and health of others? And, how would he want us to do it? There are no easy answers. But, let us within the realm of Christian love begin the conversation. Amen.