

Augusta First Baptist Church
Mark 5:21-43
The Challenges of Faith: Healing for Today
March 18, 2007
Lent 2007

*21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. 22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23 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." 24 So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for **twelve years**. 26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." 29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" 32 He looked all around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." 35 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?" 36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." 37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. 38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." 40 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. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" 42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was **twelve years** of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

On this fourth Sunday of Lent, our Challenge of Faith for today is the subject of "healing" - more specifically, faith healing. What exactly do we mean by that anyway? I am not sure about your background but when I think of faith healing I think of, well pardon me for sounding judgmental, but television charlatans. They make the healing of faith look something like a magic show: hocus-pocus, praise the Lord and suddenly the cancer is gone, hearing is restored, the blind see, the pain goes away or whatever else ails you has disappeared.

I don't buy it, not one bit. Yet, I do know that the sting of death and the desperation of brokenness stir within every one of us, a longing for healing.

The Bible addresses the subject of healing from Old Testament to New Testament. In the Old Testament, people such as Moses, Elijah and Elisha were involved in healing others. Paul, the apostle said, there were some believers who had the "gift of healing" (1 Corinthians 12:9). The essence of the ministry of Jesus was of healing. Out of 64 miracle stories in the Bible, 47 are about healing of some kind. What the Bible makes clear is that disciples of Jesus are actively engaged in bringing about healing.

Healing comes from the Greek word *qera,peuw*, [*therapeuo*] which is the root behind "therapy" and

“therapeutic.” It is most often translated as to heal, or to cure, but its primary definition is “to serve.” **When you are in the healing ministry, you are serving people at their needs.** And I believe, if we are to be the church that is serious about, *every member is a missionary*, then we are going to have to take seriously our role as missionaries of healing.

It can be easily established that miraculous healing, has not only a Biblical history, but even a contemporary one. Many times during the sharing of prayer concerns, we will hear stories of loved ones who receive a clean bill of health after a lengthy illness. The doctors say it is miraculous, we say “Amen” and move on to the next concern. But what do we do about those whose healing we have earnestly prayed for, and yet have succumbed to their illness? Was it a lack of faith? Or, were enough prayers offered to ring up in God’s celestial calculator? Did the person we did the praying for, not have enough faith? What is it? Or is healing really possible?

Anyone who has ever tasted the bitter disappointment of not experiencing healing, even though prayers, faith, and belief, were all central, knows that healing is a challenge of faith. That is why on this Fourth Sunday in Lent, I want us to explore healing as a challenge to faith.

There was a church of a different denomination across the street from one of my former pastorates - an old historic church. Union soldiers during the Civil War used their chapel as a hospital. I am told that there are blood stains still on the wooden floors beneath the carpet. This was not uncommon during that war, and it is not entirely inappropriate. A church is much like a hospital... There are forces out there that are degenerative in nature. They seek to break down, not build up. Commercials unabashedly say, “You’re not pretty. You’re too fat, too poor, too old...” There are diseases that invade our lives and threaten our existence... And then there are the sicknesses of the soul: Two out of every ten of us are clinically depressed, and 23 percent of all adult women have had at least one major depressive episode. There are those whose stomachs are riddled with ulcers caused by stress, emotions clouded with anxiety, and faith blunted by doubt. In a time, where terrorists are prominently featured on most news periodicals, we are reminded just how sick we are with fear. Healing is both a challenge of faith and the work of God’s people.

A healing ministry is not simply about medical and miraculous restoration of diseases and the like. Healing is not always a cure for the infirmity. Biblical healing is about restoration. But it’s kind of odd. We often want people to come to church only after they have been healed, that is, cleaned-up, presentable, like us.

In our gathering this morning, there are those among us who know all too well how messy life can get. Whether it’s one of our children going through a divorce or a doctor's diagnosis, life often can be debilitating and complicated. That's what was happening to Jairus, one of the synagogue leaders. At one moment of his life, he is a man working in a noble career as well as a proud papa. But life got messy and now his daughter is at the point of death. It is, of course, every parent's nightmare.

Do you remember when you discovered how perverse life can be? We all do.

When we dare to look life squarely in the eye and see how broken it can be, is it any wonder that folks will turn to anything and everything for a chance at healing. Charlatans will always have a vocation peddling divine healing to the broken and hopeless. If you “google” “healing” you will have over 80 million websites to choose from. But God is not a shelf item that can be bought and sold. God is not a commodity to be exchanged for the promise of healing.

Another story in Mark’s gospel is about the woman hemorrhaging blood for twelve years. Scholars seem

to think that the woman in this story suffered from "menorrhagia," a disease in which the menstrual flow is abnormally prolonged and may produce anemia. We need to understand a couple of implications such an illness had for her. Because of her bleeding, under Levitical law, she was ritually unclean. That means she was not allowed to worship, nor was she allowed to touch anyone. Can you imagine such a sense of isolation she must have felt? She more than likely lived, for the past twelve years, a life of secrecy and shame. She had absolutely no support systems, including the religious institutions.

She was sick and desperate. She reached through the crowd surrounding Jesus, touched his cloak, thinking, "If only I touch his hem, then maybe things will be all right."

"If only..." These are despondent words that have passed through lips down through the generations. "If only this treatment works... If only my husband would come back... If only this dark cloud of grief would lift... If only this church could provide me some hope..."

If Only...

This woman had no support systems. No one left to turn to and she felt like she couldn't even face Jesus. And don't forget about Jairus, the synagogue leader. Most of the time, religious leaders are not depicted favorably. But today, Jairus in a most undignified and unbecoming way, falls at the feet of Jesus because he has nowhere else to turn. I am convinced that we need not look any further than our own doorstep to find people like this, who cling to the desperate and despondent words, "if only..."

Last week, a couple of us visited the Good Samaritan Respite Center. It is located on Broad Street, and chances are you have never needed its services. Week after week, however, it is filled with people much like this woman in the Bible - men and women who have no where else to turn when they leave the hospital, because they have no home to go to, no family to welcome them, or, quite frankly, they have made mistakes, and their situation has now become desperate. But the Good Samaritan Center has become the presence of Christ to a wounded world.

Faith and healing is not casually assuming God is going to save us from our problems and all we have to do is sit back and watch God do his thing. Faith and healing is collapsing at the feet of God, even when all other resources of hope are exhausted. Sometimes, it is nothing more than a grasping and clutching out in a crowd, believing that maybe even a frayed hem will bring some hope.

There were three barriers that both Jairus and this unnamed woman had to overcome to find healing: Significance (my problems are too small for God to care about.) Religious (*aren't you glad Christ cares more about wholeness than our distractions with religious convention?*) Differences (Jesus smashed all the social and religious barriers in these two stories.) For many, these three barriers block our way as well. Healing, we see, is surrendering – an opening up – to the power of God. Healing, to be certain, does not always mean being cured. The fact is, and this may sound callous and brutal, we will all die of something.

Healing is pushing forward in direct opposition of all that is against you. It is pushing forward and to go on living even when you feel it may be easier to collapse and give in. It is pushing forward when you don't have all the answers and all the data comes back inconclusive.

To be agents of healing, to worship in a house of healing, is not based on our conditions, but God's. And here is some really good news: Healing is to know God's participation. Remember what happened to Jesus after the woman touched the hem of his garment? The scripture says, "...he felt power leave him."

God's healing does not always come with a physical cure. We will all succumb to something some day. But God's healing crosses all our barriers to make us truly whole.

A prayer for those who work with the sick

Bless these hands, Lord that their touch may be tender. There are those who will come this way who know no tenderness and have felt no mercy, so bless these hands.

Bless these ears, Lord that they may hear. There are those who will come this way silenced by oppression and have no one who will listen, so bless these ears.

Bless this mouth, Lord that blessings may pour forth. There are those who will come this way who have no one to speak to them or for them, so bless this mouth.

Bless these eyes, Lord that You may be seen. For You will come this way as the least, the last and the lost, so bless these eyes. **Amen.**