

In today's reading from the gospel of Mark Jesus restores two people to life. The first and the most obvious is the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus. The little girl had been ill and her father was desperate for a cure, so desperate in fact that he kneels at Jesus' feet and begs for help. This is an amazing action for someone who was the leader in the synagogue, therefore part of the establishment, to make himself vulnerable in public, in the presence of a wandering teacher, one who was already being regarded with suspicion by the civil authorities. But Jairus was desperate and so he prostrates himself and Jesus agrees to go with him. By the time that Jesus gets to Jairus house, having been delayed by the interaction with the woman with the hemorrhages, the girl is dead. The crowd that has gathered is weeping and wailing. Jesus waves them all aside and declares that the child is not dead but sleeping. He is mocked but ignores the crowd, goes inside, sees the little girl and tells her to get up... and so she does. Jesus has now brought the dead back to life. A miracle by Jesus is easy enough to accept even when we know that this is not something that we would expect for ourselves in our wildest most desperate prayers.

The healing of the woman with the hemorrhages is another story. However much we might feel for Jairus' and his daughter the story of the woman with the hemorrhages is both heartbreaking and hopeful and helps frame for us what we can expect from Jesus when we ask for healing.

The woman with the hemorrhages was desperate too. She'd been bleeding for 12 years and had spent all her money on doctors to no avail. She was broke and she was still sick. In some ways healthcare hasn't changed at all in 2,000 years. As we all know there are some things for which doctors have no cure and even when you have health insurance you can still go broke trying to pay for medical care.

There is, however, another component to this woman's illness. Although Mark doesn't say specifically that the woman's hemorrhages have to do with menstrual blood, most commentators agree that that is probably what is going on. Therefore, the woman would have been considered ritually unclean. This might have excluded her from some kinds of contact with others, so her illness made her an exile. She was not living a life of the living but the life of one who had no place in society. In addition, she was now broke. What was left for her?

The woman seeks Jesus as a last recourse, just as Jairus sought Jesus as a last recourse. Because of her illness she doesn't feel that she can approach Jesus directly and I suspect that the underlying reason was shame. Commentators differ on the degree of social impurity her condition imposed and whether her touch would be considered to defile Jesus. Whatever the reason for her stealthy approach she works her way through the crowd getting closer and closer and is so sure of his power that she will be content if she just touches his clothes. When she touches Jesus, she knows that she has been healed.

There are two dimensions to this woman's healing. Her disease is cured. Most of us know that when we reach out to Jesus, when we pray fervently for healing for ourselves or someone we care about, healing doesn't always take place in the way that we hoped it would.

Sometimes the nuances of a translated word matter. In this case the NRSV says that the woman was healed of her disease. But the word in Greek can also be translated as suffering or affliction, and in this case the woman's suffering was caused by her disease but it had other implications about her role in society as well. Healing in its entirety is not just being cured of an illness or repaired after an accident it's about being restored to life. Although that life is not always the same as it was before it can be restoration to life in Christ where we are nurtured and supported.

Once when I was visiting with a woman in a rehab facility who had been hospitalized and out of commission for several months. Her ailment was serious, and she had almost died of it several times. She hadn't had many visitors and I asked her about being lonely she told me that she spent a lot of time talking to God...sometimes telling him what she thought of him, but mostly praying. And I asked her if her prayers had been answered. She responded ye., At one point she had said to God that if it was going to be this painful just to take her and get it over with. Instead, here she was getting better. Regardless of the outcome she had faith in God. She had a relationship with God that got her through a very trying time.

We see this in Jesus' words to the woman after she has been healed. He had felt the power had gone out of him and wanted to know for what end. When she comes forward and prostrates herself Jesus says "Daughter, your faith has made you well..." Jesus doesn't just cure her disease he names her daughter. He doesn't just call her woman, or the Aramaic equivalent of Miss or Ma'am, he calls her daughter. He claims her in relationship to himself. That's what happens to us when we reach out to Jesus, that is what trumps physical healing. That is what can give us hope even when our bodies fail us. Through Jesus, through his life death and resurrection we too have been made children of God. With Jesus we can endure suffering, we can know that we are not alone, we can know that we are loved, we can rest secure in the knowledge and the love of God. We can find healing in acceptance and the peace of God that passes all understanding, even in the absence of a physical cure.

Amen