

*Thinking about Healing and Curing and How They are Different*  
*Mark 5:21-43*

Last Sunday it was a delight to help host a newcomer brunch, where we welcomed a wonderful group of folks who have been worshipping with us over the last year. There were others who were unable to be with us because they were out of town. Thanks so very much to the Wednesday morning Bible Study group, Susan and Jack Couzens, and Dick Bass for helping to make it happen.

When I left here after the brunch I drove to Livonia to pay my respects at a visitation for Kathy, a former parishioner from the church I served there. She died of melanoma which had spread through her body. She was 55 and left behind new grandbabies and lots of relatives. She was from a very large, well-connected extended family very prominent in the life of the congregation. In the great recession of 2008 her husband lost his job and they followed new employment for him all the way to Florida. They had to move a long long way from her family, her friends, and her church. She found a job, but she never found a church there that felt like home. And she got the cancer diagnosis shortly after they moved. So she was there dealing with this diagnosis and prognosis, far removed from the support of her community and her church. She reached out to me when things started to get worse, but that was after I had left that congregation and was living in Washington DC.

It was very awkward, frustrating, and heart-wrenching – for me. I had made it very clear to that congregation when I left that they were no longer to call on me for pastoral care. The prior pastor had some difficulty setting boundaries in that area so I had to be firm. By this point she was in Florida, desperate – and without spiritual support or a faith community. I contacted the interim pastor in Livonia and explained the situation to him. He ok'd my connecting with her. My contact with her was minimal. We exchanged some emails and text messages and spoke on the phone a few times. I sent her a book I thought would be helpful. I tried to help find her a spiritual director and encouraged her to connect with a congregation. I prayed with her over the phone. Eventually she went into hospice care and stopped replying to my texts. I received an email from her mother on May 28 that she died.

We meet Jesus today encountering two women, one who is ill with a flow of blood that won't quit, and one, the daughter of a wealthy man, who has just died. The woman has been ill for 12 years – exactly the number of years the daughter of Jairus has lived. And all of them are desperate.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, the saying goes. The woman with the flow of blood has been cast out of her community, not because her husband's employment took her to Florida, but because the nature of her illness violated purity laws. Talk about being boxed in. She's cast out because of her illness, and she can't get the help she needs because she's cast out.

The context for Jesus' ministry is first century Palestine and a social system organized around purity: the polarities of pure and impure, clean and unclean. This purity system created a world with sharp social boundaries: divisions between the righteous and sinner, whole and not whole, male and female, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile. Insiders and outsiders. Both Jairus and the woman with the flow of blood were desperate enough to take a big risk: to cross these social boundaries and reach out to this itinerant healer named Jesus. The woman was reaching *up*, beyond her status as an outcast. Jairus was reaching *down*, well below his status as a wealthy man. Both of them end up in exactly the same place: desperately clinging to Jesus with nothing but faith.

I logged a lot of hours in Bible Study with Kathy's mother, whose name is Pat. Pat is a retired nurse. We had lots of conversations about healing, and especially about the difference between healing and curing. But that was long before she ever dreamed her daughter would die of cancer. I don't know where her thinking about this is now. I don't know how this out of order death has had an impact on her faith.

Today Jesus realizes the hemorrhaging woman has been healed – when she touches the hem of his garment, he feels power go out from him, she tells him the story and he says, “your faith has made you well.” Sometimes that’s translated, “Your faith has *saved* you.” The Bible uses the word saved or salvation not only to describe being made right with God, not only to be promised eternal life. The word *save* is also used in reference to the healing of the body. The word for salvation used in the Bible is also the word that is translated *made well or whole*. Think of the word *salve*, spelled s-a-l-v-e, although it is pronounced sav. It means an ointment that soothes and heals, or something that eases pain or anxiety. The word saved, or made well, is used in Scripture to describe the person who has consciously *sought* healing and is *aware* that the healing came from God. This is different from being cured. When one is cured, a disease and its symptoms are gone, but there may be no awareness of a relationship to God in the curing.

I know Pat wanted a cure for her daughter. But she also knows that healing is more than cure. Someone else, a husband and father, Christopher Maricle describes himself like Jairus. “I have struggled deeply with the need for healing in my family,” he says. “In prayer, I have been a beggar before God, pleading for the healing of my wife and my son. But what I wanted really was cure. Healing is more than cure. A cure solves a medical problem. Healing means coming to peace with the way things are. Healing is the restoration of meaning to peoples’ lives, no matter what their physical condition might be. And that’s why healing is much more likely to happen when we are connected to one another, with Christ the healer at the center of that connection, and the community of desperate beggars gathered around that center. Which is where we are, and who we are, right now: clinging to Jesus with nothing but faith. And Jesus, who is no respecter of arbitrary human made boundaries, comes to us and meets us as where we are, as we are, bringing healing, wholeness and salvation.

That was true for Kathy’s family last Sunday as they gathered in community to claim the hope and promise of resurrection for Kathy and for themselves. I pray you will help make it be true for all newcomers among us, even as it is true for us now. We never know when a Kathy is walking through our door, hoping to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment.

*Pastor Dana Runestad*

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### **Sources:**

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