

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
June 30-July 1, 2018
Mark 5:21-43

“Help and Healing”

Scripture Verse: “And he [Jesus] said to her, ‘Daughter your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease’ (Mark 5:34).

There’s lots of sports to watch over the summer: the Nats, of course; the upcoming All Star baseball game; the World Cup. In the midst of this, my wife and I have found great enjoyment in watching a series on Netflix from BBC, “Call the Midwife.” You may be familiar with this as well. It’s based on the real-life experience of a young nurse who worked as a midwife in one of the neediest parts of post-WWII London. What is so captivating about this are the people stories. Midwives help bring children into the world, but in working with the nursing sisters with whom they live in a convent, they also tend to people across life’s spectrum. Some of these stories are humorous and some are heart-breaking. What is it like to have a chronic health condition? What is it like to live with an illness or disease for which there is no cure? What is it like to sit at the bedside of a loved one who is gradually growing weaker, and medically speaking, there is nothing more to be done, knowing that death is not far off? At some point, we all have to confront the reality of sickness and the end of life. We would perhaps rather not think about these things, and in fact, there can be a great deal of denial in our culture about sickness and death. In spite of tremendous advances in medicine and technology that bless our lives, what Scripture records about the woman in today’s Gospel lesson seems very current: **“And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse”** (Mark 4:25-26). There are many people like her among us today. The Health section of *The Washington Post* on Tuesdays records the stories of many people whose diseases were not diagnosed or treated, and who, like that woman, did not get better, but rather grew worse. Into our world marred by sickness and death comes Jesus, who brings help and healing as no one and nothing else can do. That is the theme for the message this day: Help and Healing. May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Today’s Gospel is actually a story within a story. First, Jesus is summoned to bring healing to a little girl who was at the point of death, the daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the local synagogue. The need was urgent and Jesus went. Twice we are told that “a great crowd” surrounded Jesus (Mark 4:21, 24). And this is how I imagine it was for the Lord Jesus on many days: people flocked to him because of their great need for help and healing. Day in and day out, they came to him; a never-ending stream of people in search of hope. Did they all trust and believe that Jesus was the divine Son of God, sent to bring healing not only for the body, but forgiveness, life, and salvation for the sin-sick soul? Or did they come because they heard that this Jesus of Nazareth was some kind of miracle worker? I am sure that for many it was the latter. We learn from God’s Word that Jesus graciously bestowed this gift on many. And now the story within the story: as Jesus is going to Jairus’ house, a woman reaches out to touch his clothing. Her medical condition rendered her perpetually unclean, according to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 15:19ff.). She was ritually unclean and everything she touched was unclean. This unnamed woman, **“who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse”** (Mark 4:26), said to herself: **“If I touch even his garments, I will be made well”** (Mark 4:28). And that is faith; trusting that Jesus can help, even if our faith is small and imperfect. Like that woman, we also come to Jesus with all of our needs, not just for ourselves, but for others; for help and healing, trusting that Jesus can indeed help. What follows is almost a bit of comedy here in Scripture as Jesus ask his disciples, **“Who touched my garments?”** (Mark 4:30), to which the disciples reply: **“You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’”** (Mark 4:31). It’s almost as

if they're saying to Jesus, "Well, duh! Look at all these people! Of course, someone touched you." But this was different because Jesus perceived **"that power had gone out from him"** (Mark 5:30). The poor woman then came forward, fearful that she would be reprimanded or punished. Not so. Jesus comforts her with these gracious words – this week's Scripture verse: **"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease"** (Mark 5:34).

Jesus' help and healing now circles back to Jairus' daughter, but it was too late. The little girl had already died. But Jesus is undeterred: **"Do not fear, only believe"** (Mark 5:36). Amidst all the noise and commotion, the weeping and wailing, of the hired professional mourners, Jesus is laughed to scorn as he tells them: **"Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping"** (Mark 5:39). Undeterred, Jesus boots them all out except the girls' parents and his disciples. Jesus then demonstrates that he is Lord over life and death, and in his hand is the breath of every living thing (Job 12:10). **"Little girl, I say to you arise"** (Mark 5:41). And she did, to the utter amazement of everyone. And then comes this little verse that is unique to Mark and speaks much of Jesus' compassion and understanding of human need: **"... and [he] told them to give her something to eat"** (Mark 5:43b). This is kind of Savior we have: one who understands the frailness and fragility of being human. We have a Savior who is able to bring about that final and ultimate healing, raising us from death to life, through his own life-giving death and resurrection. The cross stands empty, and the tomb is open. We worship and serve a risen Savior who has brought life and immortality to light. And so we say with the prophet Jeremiah in the opening words of today's Old Testament lesson: **"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness... For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men"** (Lamentations 3:22-23, 31-33).

What of that woman who was healed of her disease and Jairus' daughter who was raised from the dead? We read no more of them in Scripture. Their healing was only temporary, and eventually they died, as we all will. But their stories are told here in sacred Scripture to point us to the greater truth that there is One who is able to bring help and healing: Jesus. Some years ago, a former member of this congregation was diagnosed with ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease, for which there is no cure. In their journey through this, he and his wife helped me to understand the difference between healing and curing. When we come to know the steadfast love of the Lord, that he died to take away our sins, and that in him our future is secure no matter what, there is peace which passes all understanding, even in the midst of heartache and sorrow along life's way. That is healing, not just for the body, but for the soul. In his wisdom, the Lord Jesus may choose to bestow physical curing for our sickness and disease, ailments and maladies, in life, as he did in today's Gospel, and that is a tremendous gift. But if he chooses not to bestow such a cure, this doesn't mean that he loves us any less. We all await that great and ultimate gift of healing when Jesus shall say to each of his children on that great and final day: "Little girl/little boy, I say to you, arise." And we will arise to that full and abundant eternal life which God first intended for us. In all things we pray as Jesus himself as taught us: Thy will be done. And the Lord's will is that his good and gracious will be done in our lives, and that his kingdom come and reign among us.

May the Lord graciously bestow his help and healing on us all, for his glory and for our good. Amen.