

## “Be Made Well”

Proverbs 18:10, 14, 24

Mark 5:25-34

We don't often have services of healing and wholeness in the Presbyterian church – you might not even know that these healing services are described in our official Directory for Worship and we have sample services (more than one) spelled out in the Book of Common Worship. We don't hold these services a lot because I think that they make us a bit nervous. They evoke images of faith healers and charlatans, snake oil salesmen who promise the world – perfect healing for perfect faith – and then they get out of town in a hurry. That's not us. Our faith is not grounded in a belief that if we show a satisfactory level of holiness, then we will be healed. Our faith is not grounded in the idea that if you pray just the right words – an ancient, secret prayer – then G-d will bend the universe to our desires for wellness. Our faith is not grounded in the notion that we could be healed if only the specially gifted miracle worker would stroll through town.

So where does that leave us? What is our prayer, what is our hope? How do we make it through sickness, infirmity, disability – our own or that of a loved one? What is a faithful response to sickness?

I've been meditating on what it means to be faithful through sickness for a while now. Though I am, admittedly, quite a film buff, I was surprised to find my thoughts turning to two unlikely movie legends: James Bond and Indiana Jones. These characters are great fun, immensely popular action movie figures who differ from one another significantly. James Bond, 007, is a secret agent – meticulously trained, debonair to a fault, charming, loaded with gadgets, cars, women, and style. Sure, he has setbacks in his missions, but he's slick, smart, and cool –

almost always one step ahead of the villains. Then there's Indiana Jones: a Ph.D. professor in archaeology, sort of a regular guy, cynical, funny, passionate about what he believes in. You know, "it belongs in a museum." Certainly he's well trained in his field, but I have a hard time imagining that back in his days as a doctoral student they had instruction on: how to wield a whip to escape a giant, rolling boulder; how to flee from enemies almost everywhere in the world; and how to bring a gun to a knife fight. For Indiana Jones, things go wrong all the time. He doesn't have fancy gadgets and expensive, governmental support. He's a regular, flawed guy who just keeps trying different things until something – anything saves his neck.

How do we respond in a faithful way when we are faced with sickness? Do we think we have to be James Bond: cool and collected, rarely faltering and looking impeccable as we go? Or can we be Indiana Jones: get angry sometimes, shift courses, reach out for new allies, and trust that somehow our persistence born of faith will help us make it through? Put another way, we might ask if we pressure ourselves to be a saint no matter what we're going through or if we can let ourselves be human and in need of grace.

We find such a person in our miracle story from the Gospel this morning. For twelve years of her life she had hemorrhages. She saw doctors, spent all her money, sold what she had to find relief, but still her condition deteriorated. Twelve years is a long time to suffer. In verse 26, we read that, "she endured much under many physicians." It's hard to tell from our translation, but the word for "endured" refers less to physical pain and more to emotional pain. It echoes with the sorrows of being ill-treated and the anguish that comes from it. Maybe this is a subtle reference to the kinds of treatments that were prescribed to her. Maybe it carries the collective roller coaster of hopes built and dashed, lifted and stolen away over such a long time.

We don't know what she heard about Jesus or what she expected of him, but he was probably her last hope. With no more resources, where else could she go? What else could she do? More than anything, she wanted to be made well. So, she reached out and touched his cloak. There are different words for "touching" in Greek. This one is often used to describe Jesus' action when he performs healings. It specifically means touching something when you intend to bring about a modification or change through your touch. In her case, she wanted to be fully remade through contact with Jesus.

When she touched him, the flow of the hemorrhage stopped – it literally dried up within her. And she felt it in her body – directly experienced and not externally observed. Immediately, it was done and she was healed. And it is only after she was healed of her disease that we learn something more of her pain. There are many words for sickness in Greek, but here the word is *mastigos*. This was literally the name of a whip that the Romans used to scourge criminals – leather strips with metal sewn in. Metaphorically, it was used of a disease that equaled the pain of the lash – that was acute and had lingering, dreadful after-effects. It was used to describe a disease that was as bad as a plague, as bad as torture for the one who suffered.

To this point, we have primarily walked with this poor woman, heard her courageous hopes and her willingness to be vulnerable for the possibility of healing. Now we shift to Jesus who knows that power has gone from him. He directed his attention to her, he invoked a direct relationship with this woman who found him with unique faith and persistence. He said, "Who touched my cloak?" And the disciples...now they're functionally saying, "You're kidding us, right? There's a whole crowd of people all around you. They're so close together, everybody's bumping into everybody else on practically every step! And you wanna know who touched you?!" They said, "You see the crowd." They didn't believe that they could miss anything.

Everyone saw the same thing so, therefore, everyone understood the same thing. (In the ancient world, they didn't separate physical seeing from understanding.) "You see the crowd" just like we do.

Jesus stops and turns around. He looks for the woman. She comes forward of her own accord. Maybe she was reckless, impertinent, impolite, acting from desperation. Maybe he would be angry that she had taken power from him while his back was turned even though she needed the healing so desperately. But she knew what happened to her. This word for "knowing" goes beyond the direct experience she had before. She understands something deeper about the significance of what has happened to her. And so she comes with fear and trembling – a phrase usually reserved for awe and reverence at the mighty acts of G-d, a response to G-d's divine power. She is shaking as she falls to the ground and bows to Jesus. And then, like a witness in court, she tells him the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The truth is more than facts – it is the totality, the deeper reality of what she has experienced in the presence of the Christ.

We don't get to hear her words to Jesus – only his response to this terrified, trembling woman: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease." Just stop for a minute here. Why is Jesus telling her to be healed of her disease again? We already know from several verses ago that the disease has been cured, the flow has stopped. So what does this mean? What's happening?

Well, if you read very carefully, you'll notice that when the woman sought out Jesus, she wanted to, "be made well" rather than to be healed. To "be made well" can mean a lot of different things in the Bible. It can mean to be rescued from danger and returned to safety, it can mean to recover from illness, but it can also mean "to be saved." The root word used for

“wellness” here is the same as the word for “savior” and “salvation.” To “be made well” in this sense means more than simply curing a disease – it is a longing for wholeness in mind, body, and spirit. Indeed, when the woman is cured, the verb used has the same root as the word for “physician.” Her body is well, but her heart and her spirit need more healing. The proverb reminds us, “The human spirit will endure sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?” In the end, Jesus says that the divine gift of her faith has restored the wholeness she sought. It wasn’t her perfect will power or social etiquette; it was the faith from G-d that lifted up her limited human belief.

Jesus’ blessing to her is life – that she would be restored in every way and become free from the ravages of her disease. In wholeness, she can begin to let go of the anger and frustration of everything she lost; she can begin to let go of the fear and despair of not knowing what would become of her; she can embrace the open possibility of life held safe in G-d’s loving hands.

My friends, she was no James Bond and we don’t need to pressure ourselves to be either. Like Indiana Jones, we can pursue what is good imperfectly with bumps and bruises along the way. Like this woman, we can reach out for Jesus even when the crowds and the faithful followers don’t see the light within us. In a moment, we will have an anointing, a chance to symbolically reach for Jesus’ cloak ourselves. My friends, know that healing from Christ comes in many forms; know that Jesus hears our every need; know that Jesus holds us fast from life to death and to life everlasting. Let grace wash your wounds and set you free. AMEN.