

Sunday July 1, 2018
Canada Day
Mark 5:21-43
“Healing the Nation¹”
St. Andrews United Church, Bayfield
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Mark 5:21-43 The Message

After Jesus crossed over by boat, a large crowd met him at the seaside. One of the meeting-place leaders named Jairus came. When he saw Jesus, he fell to his knees, beside himself as he begged, “My dear daughter is at death’s door. Come and lay hands on her so she will get well and live.” Jesus went with him, the whole crowd tagging along, pushing and jostling him.

A woman who had suffered a condition of hemorrhaging for twelve years—a long succession of physicians had treated her, and treated her badly, taking all her money and leaving her worse off than before—had heard about Jesus. She slipped in from behind and touched his robe. She was thinking to herself, “If I can put a finger on his robe, I can get well.” The moment she did it, the flow of blood dried up. She could feel the change and knew her plague was over and done with.

At the same moment, Jesus felt energy discharging from him. He turned around to the crowd and asked, “Who touched my robe?” His disciples said, “What are you talking about? With this crowd pushing and jostling you, you’re asking, ‘Who touched me?’ Dozens have touched you!”

But he went on asking, looking around to see who had done it. The woman, knowing what had happened, knowing she was the one, stepped up in fear and trembling, knelt before him, and gave him the whole story.

Jesus said to her, “Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you’re healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague.”

While he was still talking, some people came from the leader’s house and told him, “Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher any more?”

Jesus overheard what they were talking about and said to the leader, “Don’t listen to them; just trust me.” He permitted no one to go in with him except Peter, James, and John. They entered the leader’s house and pushed their way through the gossips looking for a story and neighbors bringing in casseroles. Jesus was abrupt: “Why all this busybody grief and gossip? This child isn’t dead; she’s sleeping.” Provoked to sarcasm, they told him he didn’t know what he was talking about.

But when he had sent them all out, he took the child’s father and mother, along with his companions, and entered the child’s room. He clasped the girl’s hand and said, “Talitha koum,” which means, “Little girl, get up.” At that, she was up and walking around! This girl was twelve years of age. They, of course, were all beside themselves with joy. He gave them strict orders that no one was to know what had taken place in that room. Then he said, “Give her something to eat.”

On July 1, 1968, something very significant happened – something that many of us may not remember, although it continues to affect us every day....and is possibly the most noteworthy thing that unites our great country from coast to coast to coast.

(Any guesses?)

Exactly fifty years ago today, Canada’s universal healthcare system was born. Which is certainly an anniversary to celebrate!

But it was by no means an easy birth!

¹ With thanks to Don Keillor for inspiring me to research Tommy Douglas.

There was a long and controversial labour, following on the heels of the July 1, 1962 decision by the Saskatchewan government, to implement the first publically funded healthcare system in North America.

Under the leadership of then Premier Tommy Douglas, who was a democratic socialist and Baptist minister – a comprehensive provincial system was initiated that allowed for free health and hospital access to all Saskatchewan residents.

Immediately following this decision, there was a 3 week doctors strike – as many in the medical establishment and insurance industry, were greatly opposed to the idea.

But Tommy Douglas and his supporters persisted in their determination to provide all-encompassing care and inclusive coverage to all people – regardless of economic status, or political affiliation – with Douglas so committed to this concept that he resigned his provincial position in order to become the first leader of Canada's newest federal party: The New Democrats.

As an opposition leader, Douglas continued to advocate for his plan with gritty resolve, and courageous faith. Through surveys, public meetings and lots of political propaganda, he raised awareness and support all across the country, so that those in power dared not dismiss his proposal.

Eventually, the country wide health care system we know and love today, was born. And with it, the right for all Canadians, regardless of their background or their current circumstances, to live with dignity and be treated with compassion, during times of illness and injury.

This amazing system we sometimes take for granted, is envied and analyzed the world over. It's no wonder in 2004, Tommy Douglas was voted by CBC viewers as 'The Greatest Canadian.'

So Happy 151st Birthday to Canada, and Happy 50th Birthday to Canada's Healthcare system – and thank you Tommy Douglas, the 'Father of Medicare' for making it happen!

What an appropriate day to be reflecting on health, and healing.

These are themes that recur throughout our scripture stories.

And while Medicare may help with our physical health and healing, what do we learn about the type of healing that Jesus offers?

Today we hear two stories of healing....separate and yet very inter-connected stories – that really must be heard together and interpreted in light of each other.

Our Gospel this morning begins with the story of a man named Jairus. A leader in the community, a parent, a homeowner – so we must assume a wealthy man of certain status and privilege.

But also a man of faith who has heard the rumours of Jesus and his healing power, and with great hope, perhaps tinged with sheer desperation, Jairus falls at the feet of Jesus, pleading that he come lay hands on his young daughter who is sick and dying.

Without words, Jesus responds by going with Jairus – the surrounding crowd of followers and curious onlookers pushing and shoving along too.

This story, is then interrupted, by the appearance of an un-named woman; a woman who is poor, with NO power, a woman who is actually an outcast from society based on the fact that she's been bleeding incessantly for 12 years.

Without benefit of any kind of healthcare system either ancient or modern, she's been taken advantage of by doctors who have not only failed to help her, but have taken all her money.

Unlike Jairus, who approaches Jesus directly and eloquently pleads his case, this nameless woman quietly slips in from behind, and silently reaches out to touch his cloak – her own brand of faith prompting her to believe this will lead to some kind of healing.

And....whazam! Some miraculously inexplicable thing happens when she physically connects to Jesus – that not only immediately stops her 12 years of bleeding – but also somehow alerts Jesus to the fact that someone or something has tapped into his healing energy.

“Who touched me?” are the first words of dialogue that emerge from his mouth in this story.

“Who touched my robe?” “Who sapped my strength?” In a jostling crowd, it could have been anyone. And what does it matter? Why be concerned that someone has been anonymously healed – when you're in the business of healing?

And this is where we need perhaps to re-define our understanding of healing.

Because healing does not always involve a physical cure.

As a society focussed on ability and longevity and in a culture obsessed with youthfulness, we tend to equate health with physical wellbeing.

At times, it seems we actually idolize 'good health'.

And yet, the healing Jesus offers, is far more multi-dimensional.

The healing Jesus offers, involves relationships.

It doesn't just involve physical touch, but social connection.

The healing Jesus offers, offers inclusion.

So despite this woman being immediately healed of her physical ailment, Jesus stops and turns to seek her out, in order to restore her to community.

“Daughter” he names her, not ‘untouchable’ or ‘social misfit’ or ‘ostracized bleeding woman’, but “Daughter.....your faith has made you whole. Live well, and be blessed!”

Which we can assume, or hope, happens to her – no longer an outcast she now has the opportunity to work, to marry, **to belong**.

To find joy and purpose in her life.

To flourish – and be whole; to be healthy.

This story, within a story, seems complete.

But wait, back to Jairus and his daughter – and here comes word that while Jesus has been delayed with this unknown woman, the young girl has died.

“You're no longer needed” some of the mourners suggest – ‘It's too late for your healing.’

Ignoring the crowd, Jesus quietly gathers the faithful few – three of his disciples along with the girl's father – and heads to the house – where he dismisses those who say the girl is dead and enters her room. He clasps her hands, and tells her to get up – and to everyone's amazement, she does.

“Now, go give her something to eat!” Jesus instructs them. “Go – break bread together – gather around a table, and share a meal - ”

For in Jesus’ world, that is how we are healed.

By sharing with one another.

By being in community.

By including those who are excluded

And by feeding those who are hungry....

...By caring for those who are unwell – in body, mind or spirit. By tending to all members of society, especially the most vulnerable – and ensuring that no one slips through the cracks - because all members of society are worthy of care, of blessing, of inclusion.

Jesus heals by reaching out to touch others...

And calls us to do no less!

Our wonderful national health care system is a great start for our physical ailments, but it’s up to us – as a church, as a community – as a nation – to reach out and touch the lives of others and thus bring the wholeness and wellbeing that indicate true health and healing.

Thanks be to God,

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer:

God of healing and wholeness;

Today we give thanks for this safe and beautiful country in which we live,

For its richness in resources and diversity in geography....for our oceans and Great Lakes, and mountains and prairies; for our forests and farmland and cities.

For the multi-hued and multi-cultured peoples who share this land – each bringing unique gifts and diverse perspectives.

We give thanks for the things that unite us: a passion for tolerance and inclusion – a yearning for peace and harmony. A sense of justice and equality for all.

And today we especially give thanks for our healthcare system that ensures all receive adequate care and are treated with dignity.

God, we also pause to lament the things that divide us: differences in opinion over language, or use of resources;

Help us to understand your healing, as a balm of peace and acceptance, rather than as a cure.

Help us to offer healing to others – in ways that include rather than exclude – that promote the flourishing of life and upholding of the common good.

Bless us all with your healing touch – that our spiritual, emotion and psychological wellbeing is restored.

Today we especially name these concerns in your presence, trusting in your goodness and mercy to prevail in ways we may not understand:

As your faithful people, we gather in community and faithfully trust to be bold in our prayers....saying the words that unite all Christians in all ages: Our father who art in heaven.....