

Pentecost 5b – Mark 5.21-43
Messiah, Mechanicsville / Virginia Synod ELCA
06.27.2021

This morning in Mark's gospel we have two miraculous healing stories. Jesus healing the woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years and Jesus raising from the dead Jairus's daughter.

Jesus is on his way to Jairus's house because Jairus has come to him begging Jesus to heal his daughter. A large crowd follows Jesus, so large that they are pressing in on him.

Amongst the crowd is a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years. She has tried all number of remedies and has spent all the money that she had. And nothing has helped. In fact, she has gotten worse. But she has heard about Jesus and comes to see him. She reaches out, touching his robe knowing, believing, having deep faith that doing so he will heal her. And she is right - she is healed by Jesus! Miraculous, right?!

But Jesus' miracles aren't done for the day. He continues on to Jairus's house – even though some have told Jairus and Jesus not to bother because the child is already dead. But Jesus is one who works miracles, and he tells them that she's not dead, she's simply sleeping. Jesus takes the girl by hand and raises her from the dead.

Y'all, just that information enough is truly miraculous - a woman is healed of the bleeding that she has lived with for 12 years simply by touching the robes of Jesus. And a young girl just 12 years old is raised from the dead simply by Jesus taking her hand. Wow!

So we could stop right there and just be truly amazed and in awe of the power and might of Jesus, right? And I think many people, including those who would have heard Mark tell this story and those who experience the story itself, might stop right there and just been in amazement of the power of Jesus to heal someone who had been bleeding for 12 years and to raise a little girl from the dead.

But the power and awesomeness of Jesus goes beyond physical healing. I think this is one of the reasons why, in Mark especially, Jesus tells people not to say anything about what they have seen and heard. Because Jesus' ministry is about more than physical healing. Jesus is more than just another miracle worker. Jesus is the very presence of God among us!

The magnificence and the wonder of the story of these healings is that they go beyond physical healing and really and truly involve a full, holistic restoration to abundant life. That is the majesty of God's presence with us – abundant, fully lived life!

Let's consider the woman who was healed of her bleeding. We are told that she has been hemorrhaging for 12 years. Think about that for just a minute – 12 years of constant, constant hemorrhaging. Most likely the hemorrhaging she is experiencing is menstrual bleeding. Twelve years of nonstop bleeding.

As I think about that: the pain and discomfort must have been exhausting and overwhelming. Anyone of us who lives with chronic illness may have a glimpse into this woman's daily life.

Mark also tells us that this woman has seen countless doctors and has exhausted all of her financial resources in hopes of curing this bleeding disorder. But nothing has worked; in fact, she feels worse rather than better. Again, those of us who live with chronic illness or who live with or know someone with chronic illness have a glimpse of the financial strain that can place upon our lives.

And to add to her challenges, the non-stop bleeding would have separated this woman from the community. Jewish law required that a woman who was menstruating had to be separated from the community for 7 days. This was a time of ritual impurity because of the presence of blood. And after those seven days she was once again restored into the community. There were similar laws for all sorts of discharges from the body. But this woman has been hemorrhaging for 12 years without stop, so she has been separated from the community for 12 years.

Many of us have lived with the experience of being away from the community, living without human contact, physical touch, etc. for the last 15 months or so of this covid-19 pandemic. Add to that the mental health concerns which surround that kind of isolation. Now can you imagine *12 years* living in that kind of isolation.

In addition to the isolation brought about by her hemorrhaging the woman has also exhausted all of her financial resources in hopes of finding a cure. So now she is also living in financial insecurity. Which also would have isolated her from the community. Those of us who have lived or are living in poverty have a glimpse of this woman's experiences.

And as a woman who's been hemorrhaging from her womb for 12 years, that means she has not been able to birth children. In the first century, motherhood was the primary way that women had worth and value in society. So we have a woman who is isolated from the community, living in pain and discomfort with constant bleeding, exhausted of her financial resources and told by society that she has no value. Her experience of the societal brokenness of isolation must have been overwhelming. And so she comes to Jesus seeking healing. And what she receives is not just physical healing but also the healing of spirit, of mind, of financial security, of dignity, of hope – all of which Jesus grants with her restoration to community.

The healing of this woman of her hemorrhaging hasn't healed her not only in body but has also brought her healing and restoration to the community. This healing will bring about more financial stability as she no longer needs to spend money to seek a cure. Her healing means that the bleeding has stopped so she can be restored to ritual purity in the life of the community. Jesus even calls the woman, "Daughter" – speaking to her as one who is in relationship with him and with others.

The healing of this woman by Jesus is truly holistic. It's about her whole life. Her whole body. Her whole self. It's about her restoration to abundant Life so that she can live in community, so that she can experience once again life with others. So that she no longer needs to live in isolation and shame and pain and discomfort. I mean y'all, this is truly amazing, truly miraculous.

We see similar restoration to wholeness in the raising of Jairus's daughter. When he gets there Jesus reaches out to Jairus's daughter and takes her by the hand – again extending physical touch.

Jesus lifts this young girl up, restoring her to wholeness and to life. He tells the people who are gathered there to get her something to eat. This is restoration not just to life but also back to the community. Because the girl is again living together with others, eating a meal with others, sharing in that sacred presence that happens in the simplicity of eating a meal with someone else.

Again I think of how many times, over the past 15 months, that so many of us have longed to join with our families or friends for a meal. That's part of the abundant life that Jesus has restored to Jairus's daughter and to her whole family. Jesus' simple instruction to get her something to eat shows not only that she truly, truly alive but also that she's restored into the community of the family – to gather together, to eat together, to live together. Again y'all, this is truly miraculous and holistic – and so, so amazing.

As I think about these two miraculous healing restoration stories I can't help but think about our lives today. Where are the places and what are the times when Jesus is still today restoring us to health and wholeness, to healing and community?

I think sometimes we can miss the miraculous happening in the world around us every day because – well I'll just speak for myself – because I think of miraculous moments as big, grand things that I need to be on the lookout for rather than also looking for the fullness and wholeness of life that happens every single day.

So, I invite us to take a moment and think about all of the ways that Jesus' holistic ministry of restoration is happening all around us.

I asked my family about this over dinner.

As you might guess, immediately, we all thought of the ways that we have been able to gather once again with family thanks to the COVID19 vaccines.

My husband spoke of the joy of being able to go and be present in the room with his dad. Even though they had talked by phone and Facetimed, there is something special about being in the room together.

My eldest son spoke of the gatherings with family to celebrate birthdays and graduations. He spoke with joy of the magnificence of the life of being together after the pandemic. How it can be rejuvenating to be able to meet with family again. He also spoke with wonder about the miraculous nature of just how quickly scientists were able to get a vaccine out and how successful it has been. Yes, he noted, there is still work to be done because the vaccine is not accessible to everyone. So not everyone has been able to live in this gift of abundant life – to part of the ministry of Jesus's restoration is advocating for ALL people to have equitable access to the vaccine.

My middle son spoke of the miraculous work of doctors, nurses, medical professionals – in all sorts of ways. He mentioned seeing a Tik Tok video of doctors who give people glasses so they can see color. And watching their reaction of seeing colors for the first time, as they ask – is that what trees look like? Or when someone has terrible illness or injury, and they are able to have rehab so they can live life more fully again. Truly amazing, right?!

I see miraculous restoration to life in the work that is done to give people a living wage. There are so many who don't have enough to eat every day. The numbers are staggering and we know that the pandemic has exacerbated that sense of hunger and isolation. Yes, there are wonderful ministries of congregations to provide food pantries, backpacks, and all of the ways that so many provide immediate assistance to our neighbors in need.

But I think also of the significance of restoration to wholeness that comes in earning a living wage. So that people can buy their own food. So that people can have the dignity of being able to provide for themselves and their families without relying on the assistance of others.

That to me is abundant life that is restoration to community and wholeness. That advocacy work, that justice work to bring about an increase in the minimum wage, to bring about the ability of people to receive a living wage, so that they can provide for themselves and live in dignity and respect. That is truly miraculous.

In this Pride month – and on this Pride Sunday – I am mindful of the inclusion of the many gifts of our sisters, brothers, and siblings who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, a-romantic, and all other gender and identity expressions. I am mindful of the isolation, pain, discomfort, fear, and injustice that so many of our LGBTQIA+ siblings face. But Jesus' ministry of restoration is working in the world and in the church to restore ALL of God's people to community, to wholeness, and to abundant life together.

I invite you also to think about and pray about ways that you see Jesus engaged in the miraculous ministry of abundant life and restoration today – in and through us, in and through others. How do you see Jesus at work miraculously in the world around you?

I encourage you to watch for ways that are both profound and everyday. Do you see the restorative ministry of Jesus active when families gather together for a meal? Do you see the abundant life of Jesus active when all students are able to learn and grow in their education? Do you see the abundant life of Jesus when someone smiles a greeting to someone else, when someone practices radical welcome, when we acknowledge one another's humanity and treat one another as children of God and sisters, brothers, and siblings in Christ?

I invite you to join me watching for the ministry of Jesus all around us!

Because the presence of Jesus is truly God's holy presence – still today. The love of Jesus is forming us into beloved community. The grace, mercy, and power of Jesus is restoring us all to abundant life! Today and always.

Amen.