

## Sermon for Sunday, July 1, 2012 Mark 5:21-43 "Cure-All"

So did anybody around here think about healthcare this week?

Just kidding.

It was hard to miss, what with the Supreme Court sustaining the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act. Ever since Thursday morning, it's been wall-to-wall coverage of the decision and what it means or doesn't mean.

You can breathe a sigh of relief, because I am not going to talk about that.

But I am going to talk about healthcare, because that is what Jesus is all about in our gospel this week.

Healing.

Jesus healing folks.

That's a safe topic, right?

Well, it isn't these days, and it certainly wasn't in Jesus' day either. On Thursday I posted a picture of Jesus with passages from Scripture where Jesus says we are commanded to go out and heal the sick, and I got comments that implied that I was endorsing a particular political view by quoting Jesus' words. It was a little disconcerting. But I shouldn't have been surprised. Jesus got some pushback, even from the religious leaders, when he first said those words. But he said those words, and he lived out those words in his own ministry.

Think about that gospel reading: it's a busy piece of work. Jesus and the disciples have crossed the sea – they do a lot of crossings, don't they? – and Jesus is teaching people on the shore. Suddenly a man approaches, a man who is highly respected in the community, a wealthy man, a righteous man, a leader in the synagogue, sort of like a Senior Warden. He stops in front of Jesus, and kneels before him. Unusual, that. Generally, the folks who are leaders in the religious establishment don't particularly care for Jesus or his teachings. But this man Jairus is different, and for a very important reason: he has a sick daughter. He tells Jesus that his daughter is dying, and asks Jesus to come and lay hands upon her to heal her. Jesus agrees, and they start walking to Jairus' home, with the crowd all following, hoping to see a miracle. The crowd is acting like all crowds do: they are crushing up against Jesus and jostling him. Everyone wants to get close to him, of course. And in the midst of this story of the healing of this dying little girl, another story intrudes.

There is a woman in the crowd. She has been hemorrhaging for many years, and all the money she spent on doctors was for naught. She still suffers from this illness, which is most likely something having to do with a menstrual disorder. This last fact is important, because such a woman would have been ritually unclean according to Jewish law. She knows that this is the law, that no one should touch her because of this ritual impurity. But she is so desperate that she claws her way forward in the crowd and reaches out and touches the hem of Jesus' robe. Immediately, Jesus stops. He stands stock still and says "who touched me?" The disciples think this is the most ridiculous question – after all, the whole crowd has been pressing in on him. Hundreds of people must have touched him as he walked. But he has felt something different from someone, a need drawing on him and his power to heal. So he looks around, and this poor woman, who up until a moment ago had been bleeding for years and now suddenly is healed of the disease, bows before him and says, "I did." When she explains the whole story, he blesses her for her faith. He acknowledges that his power has healed her, despite the fact that she was unclean, someone with whom no good religious person should have contact.

And now we turn back to the first healing story, as some people from Jairus' house show up and say that the little girl is dead, that there is no point in Jesus coming. But Jesus says, "Let's go. Do not fear, only believe." He takes only Jairus and Peter, James and John, as if he doesn't want the crowd to see what he is about to do.

They get to the house, where there are family members and friends who are weeping and wailing over the dead child. Jesus says, "Why are you weeping? She is not dead, just sleeping." All the mourners must be thinking "this guy is crazy" but they step aside. Jesus enters the house, takes the girl's hand and says "Little girl, get up!" and the child gets

up and is fine. And Jesus tells them not to tell anyone what he did, rather odd since he seemed perfectly comfortable announcing that he had healed the other woman.

On the face of it, we have two miraculous stories of healing. But there is something else going on as well: Jesus is perfectly comfortable healing the righteous wealthy religious leader's daughter. The sort of family we all are comfortable with, that we recognize around us every day. No surprise there. He's healing a "good" person.

But then in the midst of the healing of the "good" person, he heals someone who is an outcast, ritually unclean, someone the rules say he shouldn't even touch. In the context of the time, most definitely not a "good" person. And he doesn't think twice about it. He just does it.

He heals the woman just as he would heal the daughter of the Canaanite woman – a member of a people who were the enemies of Israel. He heals the woman just as he would heal a demon-possessed man, a man that was frightening to everyone around him. He heals the woman just as he would heal lepers, the most unclean of the unclean. He heals the woman just as he would heal Simon Peter's mother-in-law, that dear soul who responds to the healing by getting up and cooking them all dinner. He doesn't say that one person is worthy of healing and another is not. He just heals them.

He is clear that there is a cost in this: remember how he says that he feels the power going out from him when the woman touches his garment? But he also makes it clear that the cost, whether it is in power or time or the disbelief of the crowd that he would engage in contact with an unclean person, doesn't stop him from doing the healing.

And he makes the point by announcing the healing of the woman that even those whom society despises can be healed, and by hiding the healing of the little girl of the righteous man He reminds us that we need to say out loud that all are deserving of healing.

He keeps on saying it, all the way through the gospels, as if he knows that we need reminding.

Jesus doesn't care about our political wranglings over laws and rules. He simply cares about the hurting people in the world. Whatever happens in the national debate over reform of health care and health insurance, one thing remains true: Jesus says we have a responsibility to help, to heal, to care for those – even the ones we find hard to tolerate or whom we judge as unworthy – who are in need of health.

So pray today and every day that we do not forget that we are expected to use our power, whatever we have, to help those who are hurting. The "how" of it? We can disagree about that. But the "why" is clear: because Jesus did and told us to do likewise.

Amen.