

Your Healing Touch
November 24, 2013
Luke 8:40-56

Our Scripture reading is the story of two of the many healings Jesus performed. It comes from the eighth chapter of Luke.

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying.

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her.

She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped.

Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me."

When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." While he was still speaking, someone came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer."

When Jesus heard this, he replied, "Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved." When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother.

They were all weeping and wailing for her; but he said, "Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at

him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and called out, "Child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astounded; but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.

May God bless the reading and hearing of these familiar words, attributed to Jesus.

Let us pray . . . Loving One, remind us that as we go about our daily routines, we are called to be agents of healing. Take and use my words to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

For the last eight weeks we have been exploring the priorities of Jesus. This morning, we conclude our journey with what appears to be Jesus' top priority: healing.

Did you realize that the Gospels contain three dozen different healing events? For those of you who appreciate statistics, healing lands in first place by quite a margin. Jesus is associated with 36 unique healing events, which is 50% greater than the priority that ranks second.¹

I have not had anyone approach me over the past seven weeks to suggest that any of Jesus' priorities were great for him, but inappropriate or impossible for us. I suspect, however, that at least a few of you may be wondering about healing. Isn't it significantly different from love or prayer or even treating children as precious?

After all, we are not Jesus. Just managing our own affairs is challenging enough most days without also acting as agents of healing or helping restore people to wholeness.

Could it be that so-called Christian faith healers have given us the wrong impression?

Have you ever turned on your television and seen someone claim to heal in Jesus' name by doing very unusual things?

¹ Christopher Maricle. *The Jesus Priorities: Eight Essential Habits* (Upper Room Books, 2007), p.18.

For me, the strangest example of all comes in the form of Benny Hinn. This so-called man of God is best known for holding what he calls “Miracle Crusades.”

Held in large arenas, these events include a grand finale of sorts during which specially selected audience members in need of healing are brought on stage. After hearing each tearful testimonial, Hinn extends his hands and offers a healing touch. The recipients often respond by falling down on the floor. And, according to Hinn: if their faith is strong enough, then they will be healed.

Dear friends, rest assured that I am neither asking you to be Jesus nor validating the efforts of Benny Hinn. I am, however, inviting you to recognize and utilize your healing touch in at least three ways.

First, you heal by living with compassion.

There are at least 15 different events that feature Jesus healing when he was in the middle of doing something else.² That kind of healing can only happen as one lives with compassion.

One name I tend to associated with the word “compassion” is Karen Armstrong. This former Roman Catholic nun, has done more to unite people of many faiths around compassion than I ever imagined possible.

Just five years ago she won the TED prize – an award that came with \$100,000 to help turn a dream into reality.³ Armstrong leveraged those funds to create the Charter for Compassion.

“The Charter for Compassion is a cooperative effort to restore not only compassionate thinking but, more importantly, compassionate action to the center of religious, moral and political life. Compassion is the principled determination to put ourselves in the shoes of the others.”⁴

I am just 1 of over 100,000 people who have signed the charter so far. Perhaps your name is on or will soon find its way on to the list.

The Charter begins with these words:

² Ibid., p.23.

³ TED. “Prize Winners - Karen Armstrong.” <http://www.ted.com/pages/prizewinner_karen_armstrong>

⁴ Charter for Compassion. “Sign and Share the Charter for Compassion.” <http://charterforcompassion.org/cfc_a/index.php>

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.⁵

Whenever you live in this way, you embody compassion. The acts that flow from such a framework bring healing each and every day.

Erin Henry has taken Armstrong's Charter and created a version for children. The children's version makes it quite clear that "compassion is inside of all of us" regardless of our age. It concludes with a challenge that, if accepted, will ensure your compassionate living is a source of healing.

Make this promise to yourself. Promise to try to show compassion to everyone you see every day . . .⁶

Looking across the congregation, I see many I know who strive to be compassionate. I know you want to feel what others feel, and to make a difference.

It is certainly the case that being compassionate is a good start, but it isn't the only way you are called to heal. **A second way you heal is by saying yes to strangers.**

Jesus' example is one that models for us the importance of saying yes to strangers.

Think back to this morning's Scripture reading. Jesus is going about life when he gets interrupted by Jairus – a stranger – who wants Jesus to heal. Before he can answer, he encounters an unnamed woman – another stranger - who reaches out to him for healing. Rather than caring for and about those within his circle of friends, Jesus regularly says "yes" to strangers.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Children's Charter for Compassion. "Through the Eyes of a Child."

<http://www.childrenscharterforcompassion.com/childrens_charter_for_compassion>

What about you? Are you led by the entries on your daily calendar or by the gentle wind of God's Spirit? When you walk down the street or enter a crowded place are you so focused on your destination that you are unaware of and non-responsive to the many new people who cross your path?

Saying "yes" to strangers comes in many forms. It could be as simple as

- welcoming someone who recently moved into your community,
- or providing a few dollars to someone asking for help,
- or engaging a person you have passed many times but never really seen much less taken the time to get to know.

Saying "yes" could mean taking a detour from the day you had planned. It may even require stepping outside of your comfort zone.

Christopher Maricle is the author of a book entitled "The Jesus Priorities," which inspired my sermon series of the same title. Writing about this principle, he recalls Mother Teresa's wise advice to her students: develop your love for Jesus then go out and find Jesus in your neighbor – even by serving Jesus as you serve the poor.

What is this all about? It is about treating strangers as we would treat our closest family members. It is about our call to "extend our capacity for healing to everyone because there are no longer strangers" for those who take the Greatest Commandment seriously.⁷

Healing happens each and every time you say "yes" to those most would count as strangers. In caring about and journeying with them you are provide a healing touch.

If this all makes sense yet seems a bit overwhelming, then perhaps the next way you can heal will put all of the ways into perspective.

A third way you heal is by doing what you can.

Healing is about doing your part. No one here is called to be Karen Armstrong or Mother Teresa. Everyone here is called to follow the Way of Jesus, and to use her or his gifts wherever life leads.

We all have limitations. I hope that you know and accept yours.

⁷ Maricle, p.27.

No matter how long your list is or what it contains, you can still do a great deal.

For example, you can be an agent of healing through your prayers. You can speak to God about the needs of those you know who need healing and wholeness. You can also pray for those you know – even if you are unsure of their current circumstances.

A few years ago, I visited a woman who was unable to leave her apartment. She showed me the three books she kept within arm's reach: an address book containing handwritten names and information about many of her friends, the church pictorial directory, and a small photo album containing pictures of her family.

For her, these were prayer books: one for the morning, one for the afternoon, and one for the evening. She prayed through each from cover to cover. Whenever she reached the end, she simply started again.

Perhaps like this woman, you offer your healing touch as your fingers touch the names or images of those you cherish. Perhaps you have found other ways to do what you can, to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves or to advocate for social or economic justice. Perhaps you do more than you realize.

I promised you three points, and have delivered that number. I could end here, but my sermon would be incomplete.

We are United Church. This community of faith is intended to be one where we all come together for worship, and labor together in love. While we may agree to such an ideal, in practice many of us fall short.

As we focus on healing, we must not exclude healing that needs to take place within our church family. Listen to Jesus' words from the fifth chapter of Matthew (5:23-24):

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

This is the last Sunday of the church year. It is time to heal broken relationships. It is an opportunity for restoration.

It isn't our custom to get up and bring our gifts to the altar or to set them on the table. It is, however, our custom to gather here in this sanctuary for worship.

So, then, if you are worshipping in this sanctuary, and remember that all is not well in your relationship with someone, leave your pew and go; first seek reconciliation and healing, and then come back to continue your worship.

Today is a day of new beginnings. Whatever you do this day, make sure you extend your healing touch. Amen.