

Your Healing Touch
April 12, 2015
Luke 8:40-56

Our Scripture reading is the story of two of the many healings Jesus performed. It is found in 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 words. Let us pray . . . Loving One as we live our lives day by day remind us that 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.

Have you heard about people who claim to heal in Jesus' name by doing very unusual things? Perhaps in flipping through channels on your television you have stopped on a curious sight only to find yourself watching a faith healer in action.

Today there are more odd options than ever before. In my own limited quest for understanding I have found one man to be the strangest of all. 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 for a personal encounter with the man's healing touch. The holy man, dressed in an all-white suit, listens to tearful testimonies then lays his healing hands on the hurting people. The recipients often respond by falling down on the floor. And, then, if their faith is strong enough, they will be healed.

I hope it goes without saying that I do not endorse the theology or the methodology of Benny Hinn. I do, however, embrace the healing ministry of Jesus, and don't think that we can ignore its importance in our lives.

We are called to be faith healers of a different sort. This morning I invite you to recognize and utilize your healing touch in at least three ways.

First, you heal by living with compassion. The most common storyline for Jesus' healings in the Gospels is that Jesus was busy doing something else when an opportunity for healing arose.¹ That kind of healing can only happen as one lives with compassion.

The contemporary person I tend to associate 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 seven years ago she won the TED prize – an award that came with \$100,000 to help turn a dream into reality.² Armstrong leveraged those funds to create the Charter for Compassion.

¹ Christopher Maricle. *The Jesus Priorities: Eight Essential Habits* (Upper Room Books, 2007), p.23.

² TED. "Prize Winners - Karen Armstrong." <http://www.ted.com/pages/prizewinner_karen_armstrong>

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.”³

I am just 1 of more than 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:

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.⁴

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 . . .⁵

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

³ Charter for Compassion. “Sign and Share the Charter for Compassion.”

<<http://charterforcompassion.org/sign-share-charter> >

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Children’s Charter for Compassion. “Through the Eyes of a Child.”

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

heal. Before Jesus 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.

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,
- 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.

Mother Teresa is an exemplar of caring. She advised her students to simply develop their love for Jesus then go out and find Jesus in your neighbor – even by serving Jesus they served 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.⁶

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 providing 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.

⁶ Maricle, p.27.

We all have limitations. I hope that you know and accept yours. 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 considerable information about many of her friends, the church pictorial directory, and a 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.

Don't be like I was for many years. Don't dismiss healing as optional or work others should do. Healing must be a part of our faith journey.

You should know that of all of the many priorities we have considered and will consider in this eight Sunday series on Jesus' priorities, healing ranks #1.

The Gospels contain three dozen different healing events. With 36 separate incidents healing is #1 by a wide margin with 50% more occurrences than the priority that ranks second.⁷

Healing was central to Jesus; healing must be central to us.

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

⁷ Christopher Maricle. *The Jesus Priorities: Eight Essential Habits* (Upper Room Books, 2007), p.18.