



SAINT LUKE'S

6TH AFTER PENTECOST
PROPER 8B

WISDOM OF SOLOMON 1:13-15; 2:23-24
PSALM 30
2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15
MARK 5:21-43

A SERMON BY THE REV. BO REYNOLDS

JULY 1, 2018

I won't dance around my feelings on the subject: I find the healing narratives in the gospels to be deeply frustrating.

Through my time as a seminarian, a hospital chaplain, and now in parish ministry, I have encountered a wide array of responses to the experience of illness, loss, and suffering. Too often I have sat with folks after they receive a diagnosis or as they realize that their situation has no definitive end in sight, and they express their desire to experience God's healing. And as time stretches on, they wonder if they had prayed harder, or believed more, they would unlock the secret to divine healing in their lives. The words of Jesus to the woman who touched the hem of his garment ("Your faith has made you well") are inevitably echoed in their prayers and their words to me.

I remember the first time I was asked to lead the prayers for healing after a mass as a seminarian. I was unable to anoint people as I was not ordained at the time, but I could speak with them about their concerns and pray with them using the words of our prayerbook.

Only one woman came that day. She knelt at the chapel altar rail and quietly shared with me that she had been diagnosed with an aggressive and widespread cancer. In that moment, the full weight of my inadequacy in the face of this need crashed into me and as I fumbled to turn the pages of the prayerbook, I groaned internally, "Really, Lord? I'm a 23-year-old kid who can barely manage to remember to shave in the morning and have nothing to offer this woman."

I spoke with my priest later that afternoon about my experience, and I wondered aloud whether it was in fact cruel to dangle the hope of miraculous healing before this suffering individual when I felt that in all likelihood this disease would claim her life. My priest tilted her head to this side and thought for a moment. She then very kindly chastised my surrender to cynicism. “Healing comes in many forms,” she said “and do not presume that when people speak of or pray for healing they expect some magical resolution to their suffering. Do not mistake ‘healing’ with ‘cure’ and never, never take away anyone’s courage to hope.”

The words of Jesus to the woman suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years acknowledge this. The experience of her healing was not a transactional exchange; healing did not come because she possessed the right amount of faith required in order for God to end her suffering. This essential truth is so often the one most difficult for us to see when we are in the midst of our pain: God’s love and care for us is not conditional, full stop. The presence of suffering in our lives is not a sign of God’s displeasure or punishment.

Jesus dismantles this idea when his disciples ask him whose sin was responsible for the man born blind. Likewise, healing is not a reward for piety or faith; to believe this would make God the cruelest of tyrants.

As I read over the gospel passage before us this week, I found myself focusing on the experience of the woman herself, both as she

approached Jesus in order to touch his hem and as she found the boldness to answer Jesus' question as to who touched him. The crowds surrounded Jesus and deterred her, and yet she found the courage to grasp his hem.

She came with fear and trembling, but yet she still answered his call to come forward. As I thought about this, the words from the author of the epistle to the Hebrews sprang into my mind: "Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

I wonder how much healing this woman experienced as she allowed the courage to hope to propel her through the crowd and toward Jesus. I wonder what measures of agency and strength she found even as she fell at his feet and told of her need. I wonder what healing we find as we approach, this altar week after week, the icon of Our Lady after mass when need finds us, in the quiet of our hearts. It is in the moments when we can say with the psalmist "Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord" that we also must echo his tenacity "My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning."

This tenacity is not born of grit or pure will, but comes from knowing, as Paul says

"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor

height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We have the courage to hope for healing, we have the courage to approach the throne of grace, because we have certain knowledge in our hearts that we are held by a Love which illness, pain, suffering, and rejection cannot take from us. And it is in this blessed certainty that we find a healing and a wholeness, the courage to hope, to wait, to press through the crowd, to touch just the hem of his garment.

AMEN

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