

SERMON TITLE: "Jesus and Physical Health"
SERMON TEXT: Mark 5:21-43
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: August 9, 2015, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

During this month of August, we're working our way through chapters five through seven in the Gospel of Mark and examining how Jesus dealt with some issues of health. Last week, we read how Jesus healed the man with an unclean spirit, and we talked about how we might join Jesus in promoting mental health. Next Sunday, we'll talk about Jesus and relational health. Today, we've just read the combination-story of how Jesus healed both Jairus' daughter and a woman in the crowd. Let's take a look at this passage from Mark, chapter five, and see what we can learn about Jesus and physical health.

1—JESUS VALUED PHYSICAL HEALTH

The first observation we make from this combined story is strong verification that Jesus valued physical health. Healing people physically was a big part of what Jesus did. When the synagogue leader named Jairus came to Jesus, fell at Jesus' feet, and begged Jesus to come and lay hands on his daughter so she might be made well, Jesus didn't hesitate to go with him. Verse 23 says that Jairus begged Jesus repeatedly, which could imply that Jesus didn't move quite as fast as Jairus would have liked. But that probably had more to do with the father's desperation than Jesus' willingness to help. Jairus had heard about Jesus' reputation as a healer. The synagogue leader knew that Jesus had made many other people well. Jesus' willingness to jostle through the crowd and then keep going, even after an interruption, was confirmation that Jesus wanted to bring physical healing to Jairus' daughter.

That Jesus valued physical health is also clear in the case of the woman who touched Jesus' cloak. The fact that she was healed just by touching his garment proved that Jesus was a powerful healer. But the fact that he stopped walking and turned to look for who had touched him shows that Jesus' healing wasn't just incidental or accidental, as if he had no choice. Healing wasn't something

Jesus did haphazardly or because he had to. Jesus healed people's bodies because he cared about their suffering and anguish. Jesus took the time to find and talk to the woman because Jesus wanted to restore life and offer relief. By affirming what she had done, Jesus verified that the healing which had occurred was not something stolen against his will. By commending her faith, Jesus assured her and us that it was his goal and desire to bring physical healing. In his great compassion, Jesus valued physical health.

2—JESUS WAS ABLE TO HEAL PHYSICALLY

A second observation we make in this scripture passage is that Jesus was able to heal physically. It's one thing to value something and want it to happen; it's often an entirely other matter to accomplish it. Mark 5:25-26 gives us the information that the woman "had been suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years. She had endured much under many [expensive] physicians . . . and had only grown worse." The woman's situation was no easy case. Her disease was mysterious and difficult. And, yet, Jesus was able to cure her.

Likewise, Jairus described his daughter as being at the point of death. By the time he and Jesus arrived at the house, people were already weeping and mourning her death. By all accounts, the 12-year old girl had died and Jesus was too late. But, even then, Jesus had the power to raise her up. When he took her hand and ordered her to get up, Jairus' daughter stood up and began walking. As if to prove how well she had become, Jesus ordered them to give her something to eat. Jesus not only *wanted* to heal her, but he was *able* to do exactly that.

3—HOW DOES JESUS PROMOTE PHYSICAL HEALTH TODAY?

Throughout the 2000 years since Jesus lived and performed his miraculous healings, the Christian church has consistently tried to continue his important work. We followers of Christ value physical health for ourselves and others so much that we have built and staffed medical clinics and

hospitals all over our country and in most other countries around the globe. Here in Ogden, we have McKay-Dee Hospital that was started by the Latter Day Saints, and we have Ogden Regional Medical Center which was initiated by the Catholics. In Pueblo, Colorado, where I used to live, we had an Episcopalian hospital. In other communities, there are Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and Seventh-Day Adventist hospitals—all established because we value physical health and believe in the ability of Jesus to heal.

When I went on a Volunteer in Mission trip to Guatemala in 2002, we drove over an extremely bumpy and twisting mountain road for miles and miles to a very remote location and arrived at a Methodist health clinic that had a dirt floor, no electricity, and was no larger than my church office. On the wall was a hand-written chart that accounted for the numbers of people who had received various kinds of care through that clinic. The medicine was scarce and the healer was a part-time pastor instead of a trained medical doctor, but the clinic gave clear evidence that the people of Jesus were not only wanting to offer physical healing to the sick, but were doing so, successfully, even in difficult circumstances.

Of course, there is always more that we could do. In places like that rural Guatemalan clinic, more money would be a God-send, as it would allow them to have more basic supplies. In another Guatemalan clinic, in a city, they needed a dental x-ray machine. Joan Effiong has told us about medical needs in Nigeria. Closer to home, we could think about physical health in terms of environmental safety. On Sunday, August 23, we're going to have a dunk tank here in our church yard to raise money to purchase a fire truck for the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Montana. Our bishop, Elaine Stanovsky, has asked the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conferences to raise \$12,000 for the cause. It's a whole lot easier to have physical health if your house doesn't burn down and if your air isn't polluted by fires burning thousands of acres nearby.

Besides raising money, we have opportunities to make cheerful visits to the sick in their homes, in hospitals, and in nursing homes. We can send cards and make phone calls. We can provide rides to doctor appointments, and once in a while we can even take a casserole or a plate of cookies. Some of us are caregivers who wipe noses and bottoms to help our loved ones with their physical health. Some of us work in the church garden to provide nutritious vegetables to our congregation and to those who eat supper at the Lantern House homeless shelter. Sometimes, we followers of Christ become vocal advocates in the public square, lobbying our political representatives to provide better health coverage for the poor or raising a ruckus to get better health care for veterans. Since we can only do those good things when we ourselves have physical health, most of us watch our weight, get some exercise, and follow the advice of our doctors Did you notice how positively I phrased that? ☺

And, of course, we pray. In the tradition of Christians for 2000 years, we provide a healing touch and a word of hope. We call upon God to intervene in the course of events, to bring about the best positive outcome. Even in cases which are chronic and terminal, we pray for God's ultimate healing which takes away all pain and suffering from the body and lifts us up into the physical health of God's heavenly home. Today's scripture tells us that Jesus restored Jairus' daughter to health. But we know that, one day, she would have succumbed again to death, as we will also. In those situations, we pray,

*Precious Lord, take my hand,
lead me on, let me stand.
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.* (Thomas Dorsey, 1932)

Jesus values physical health for us. And he is able to provide it—even today.

CONCLUSION

There's one more way that Christians have acted on our belief that Jesus both values physical health and is able to provide it for us. That's through the act of anointing with oil. In James 5:14-15 we

read, "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up." So, today, in the spirit of this theme of physical health, I invite you to participate in this sacred ritual. While Jan leads us in singing some hymns about healing, I invite anyone who would like to be anointed to come up to the kneeling rail. You can come for yourself or on behalf of someone else. We will anoint you and offer a prayer. If others would like to come with you in support, that would be terrific. If you think this might be meaningful to you, please come.