

SERMON TITLE: "A Healing Story"
SERMON TEXT: Mark 5:21-43
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: June 30, 2024, at First United Methodist Church

INTRODUCTION

In the United Methodist News this week, there was a photo of a cut-out picture of Jesus taped onto the seat of a boat. Someone in North Dakota was hauling their boat to the lake to go fishing, and they were taking Jesus with them. The article told that in the very small town of Arthur, North Dakota, the United Methodist pastor had started a "Jesus is everywhere" campaign. She made 12 copies of the paper cutout of Jesus and laminated them. Then she and members of her church began placing the 12 Jesus cutouts wherever they went: to the store, to the park, to the barbershop, to the farm co-op, to the lake. The townspeople were then told that, if they would text the pastor and tell her where they saw Jesus, their names could be entered into a drawing. The pastor will draw out a name on the last day of June (which is today), the last day of July, and the last day of August. Since some kind of prize will be won, the United Methodists have created a bit of a buzz in their town of 350 people. And their community is beginning to associate their congregation with the "Jesus is everywhere" campaign. It's a way of helping their church create and be known by an identity.

Today, there are so many ways we can be known, but the best one of all is to be known as Jesus' people. To be associated with Jesus' identity, though, we need to know who Jesus was and what he did. So, today, I want us to focus our attention on this gospel story from Mark 5. Let's consider what happened and how we might find our identity in this this healing story.

1—WHO WAS JESUS?

Let's begin with Jesus. A hymn we're going to sing later in the service is titled, "When Jesus the Healer Passed through Galilee." And that's the Jesus we see in this story. First, he healed a

woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for 12 years, and then he healed a 12-year-old girl. Since there are two parts to this miracle story and they're intertwined, this account is a bit more complicated than most of the healing stories in the gospels. But maybe it's good that we have a combination story today because it helps emphasize the quantity of Jesus' healing work and that it was such an important part of his identity.

Throughout the gospels, we read of Jesus healing persons who were paralyzed, blind, lame, deaf, and mute. Jesus healed people who had fevers, those who had leprosy, those who were possessed by evil spirits, and those who had various other diseases. Jesus healed people in houses, out along country roads, and at synagogues in towns. Jesus healed his fellow Jews, he healed the daughter of a Syrophenician woman, and he healed the servant of a Roman centurion. The Gospel of Luke tells us that, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus even healed the ear of a person who came to arrest him! Talk about dedication to healing! And, although it was highly controversial and he got condemned by some religious authorities, Jesus even healed on the Sabbath day. Jesus was willing to downplay or reinterpret one of the Ten Commandments in order to provide relief to suffering people. That's how important it was to Jesus to serve his people as a healer. His identity was a healing story.

2—WHO WAS HEALED?

For sure, these verses in Mark chapter five tell a healing story about Jesus. But this healing story also identifies those who were healed.

The first person to receive healing was the woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. Throughout that long time, she had sought assistance from many physicians and spent all her money trying to get a cure for her ailment. But, instead of getting better, she had grown worse.

Can you imagine how discouraged she was? I'm guessing many of you are able to relate to her because you or your loved ones have likewise suffered health problems that were incurable, or seemingly so. The older we get, the more likely we are to have some health condition that defies treatment. And, of course, the suffering isn't just physical. Medical expenses are the number one cause of personal financial bankruptcy in the United States. There's also the spiritual and social toll that sickness takes. The less healthy we are, the more likely we are to become isolated and lonely. For the hemorrhaging woman, to finally receive Jesus' healing power and to be able to regain her life must have been an incredible joy!

The second person to receive healing in this story is the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus. We aren't told what was wrong with her, except that she was at the point of death and then presumed dead by relatives and neighbors who were grieving when Jesus arrived.

Because most 12-year-olds in the United States are physically healthy, it might be harder for us to relate to this part of the gospel story. But we do hear news on a regular basis about the high rate of teenage mental health struggles. Statistics from 2021 indicate that 42% of Utah's "youth felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more."* And, of course, we don't have to be a youth to suffer from debilitating depression or any other illness that saps our life. We may wish we could muster the energy to get up and moving, but it just doesn't seem possible. Those around us might assume that we have given up on life. So, for Jesus to come and shoo away the mourners so this girl could be restored to life was an incredible gift of healing.

Of course, the healing of this child didn't only bring energy and joy to her. It also brought healing to her family. We're told about her father Jairus who made the trip to ask Jesus for help, and we learn that the girl had a mother, who apparently had been the one tending to her at home, quite likely exhausted from caregiving. No doubt there were siblings, extended family, and neighbors among the mourners. Now that Jesus had restored the girl's life, all of them would be greatly

relieved of their worry and sadness. Now all of them would have their spirits lifted by Jesus' healing power.

Whether we relate more to the woman, the girl, the parents, or the community members, we all can appreciate some aspect of this story of healing. We know of the suffering, we long for the healing, and very fortunately, in prayer and faith, we have often experienced the joyful restoration of health in Jesus' name.

3—WHO WILL SHARE THE HEALING STORY?

As we think about the identity of Jesus as a healer and the identities of those who were healed, there's one more aspect of this story of healing of which we should take note. The woman had been hemorrhaging for 12 years, and the girl was 12 years old. It could be true that 12 was the exact number in both those cases. But it's quite likely that the number 12 was used in an overly-simplified sense because the numbers had another meaning.

Twelve was a symbolic number. Why did Jesus choose 12 disciples? Because there were 12 tribes of Israel. To use the number 12 was to say, "Listen up, people of Israel! Listen up, people of Jesus! This story is for you. This story is about you. This story is about what you should be doing." We see more evidence of this in Mark chapter six, when Jesus called the 12 disciples and began to send them out two by two. Their mission was to proclaim repentance, to cast out demons, and to heal the sick.

Today, we people who identify with Jesus have this same calling. Our mission is to proclaim God's ability to heal what ails us. Whether that is a spiritual attitude adjustment, a behavioral transformation, or a healing from sickness of mind and body, we Christians are the caretakers of a healing story. Why do we spend so much time praying for folks who are suffering from cancer, strokes, or injuries? Why do Christians offer their time and attention to help drive folks to doctor appointments, to send thoughtful get-well cards, and to take casseroles and soup to those who are

recovering from surgeries? Why have so many of our church members been nurses, social workers, or foster parents? Why do Christians lend a hand with house and yard chores for those who are limited by poor health? Why does our church go to the trouble of providing an online, digital Facebook Live worship service every week so those who are homebound can participate? Why do Christians get involved in political advocacy to expand health care access rather than reduce or deny it? Because that's what Jesus did. Because that's what Jesus called his disciples to do. Because that's what Christians of every generation are called to do also. All of us who identify as the people of Jesus are called to be involved in a healing story.

CONCLUSION

I suppose one of the reasons we tend to shy away from a story of healing is because we've all faced some disappointment, and we know lots of others who have also. We worry about setting expectations too high. After all, we aren't Jesus the healer from Galilee.

And it's true that not every sickness will be cured. In some cases, pain reduction and comfort care are the best we can do. Even the people Jesus healed eventually got sick again and died. It's important for us to recognize that sometimes death is God's way of healing us, by allowing us to enter into the restful peace of God's heavenly embrace. And that ultimate healing is also a victory. That's why we can join Jesus as joyful proclaimers and faithful practitioners of a story of healing.

So let's do it! Let's be like the woman who, even though she had experienced 12 years of frustration, she still had faith in Jesus' power to heal her. Let's be like Jairus, who sought help from Jesus. Let's be like the girl's mother who did what she could to provide care for her daughter. Let's be a people identified by a story of healing.