

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 5, 2023

2 Kings 5:1–4, 9–14;

Matthew 9:18–26

“Healing Stories”

1. When she was growing up, my Mom wanted to be a nurse
  - a. Cultural expectations and norms in rural Mexico in the middle of last century got in the way
    - i. It started because her dad was not crazy about the idea
    - ii. There was not much time for the conversation, ultimately, because got married at 18
    - iii. Mom and dad had my oldest brother right away, and having a small child at home (soon it would be a couple of young ones) dad also expressed his reluctance to have mom go back to school for nursing
    - iv. I remember mom’s disappointment when she would share those stories
  - b. The thing is, I think mom would have made a great nurse
    - i. I know because she was a great nurse and doctor the way she took great care of us!
    - ii. She knew of herbal treatments and folk remedies
    - iii. She knew about medications, and in Mexico there are some meds for which you’d need a script here in the States, but not so in Mexico
    - iv. And, I should add, that we were very fortunate because we had access to excellent, affordable healthcare
      1. Dad was a teacher and public school teachers in Mexico are part of a national union
      2. One of the union benefits is having a hospital solely for teachers and their families in my home town
      3. There we would see our primary doctor and a number of specialists
    - v. The clearest time I remember mom nursing me back to health was when I caught Hepatitis A in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.
      1. Once it was diagnosed, she made sure I stayed isolated at home
      2. She took care of me and kept an eye on me, and succeeded in having no one else in our household catch it!

3. After I think two weeks, I was able to return to school to my friends
2. We have three stories of healing in our passages today, and through them we see an emphasis in wellbeing and in particular being restored back to community
  - a. It is thanks to a young Israelite girl (who herself had been abducted from her community), who tells Naaman about the power of Elisha, the prophet, to heal him
    - i. When Naaman shows up at Elisha's doorstep after a long journey, Naaman is offended for not to be seen personally by the prophet, but then it was thanks to his slaves that Naaman is convinced to trust the process that Elisha prescribed, and Naaman is made clean
    - ii. This powerful man who probably had had everything he wanted except to feel fully embraced by his people, is now once again welcomed into his own community – and didn't have to be in isolation any longer
  - b. In the gospel, we have a story within a story
    - i. The main story, it would seem, is that the synagogue leader's daughter had died
      1. Jesus declares she's not actually dead, and the gathering mourners mock him
      2. Jesus heals her bringing her back to life and in so doing, restores her to her family and community
    - ii. But the way the storyteller shares this passage, that story is interrupted by another desperate person seeking healing
      1. This is a woman who has been suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years
      2. 12 years is a long time to be disconnected from friends and family
      3. Because in her condition, she had been pushed to the margins as being ritually unclean. She was isolated.
      4. This same story, in Mark, tells us how she had spent everything she had, suffering and in fact getting worse
      5. This woman has a single focus: I believe the rabbi can restore me to health and to my community once more
      6. In today's retelling, the woman secretly touches Jesus while in a crowd, without asking for his help, and Jesus turns

around to affirm that she has been healed because of her faith

7. This hemorrhage condition had interrupted her life for twelve long years, her life had been on hold, and now Jesus was making sure she could be reunited to her loved ones
3. I believe that God calls us to play a role in supporting the community's wellbeing and to seek people to be reunited into community
  - a. When we seek to follow Jesus, to do as he did, it may feel impossible to think that we can go around healing people like he did
    - i. Yet certainly we have medical professionals among us who participate daily in that important service
  - b. What these stories highlight as well is that healing has a component of restoring the community to health, of bringing people together
    - i. In that sense we have others who participate in that endeavor in their work as educators, for example, ensuring everyone has the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in this community
  - c. This past week and a half we've followed the news about the brutal beating of Tyre Nichols by police officers after a routine traffic stop in Memphis TN, which led to his death
    - i. We have seen that community feel incredible pain and desperation
    - ii. We have seen the support from other communities where similarly horrific violence has taken place
    - iii. We are seeing in real time the wounds caused by systems which are meant to protect but which in these instances do the opposite
  - d. And the challenge then for us is to look around us, here in Columbus, and ponder how we can be like Jesus in restoring people who were marginalized back to the center, to the whole community
    - i. To notice where the emotional wounds in our community are
    - ii. To see who has been forcibly pushed to the edges because of whatever reason, because they're unhoused, or they've been in prison, or another factor which makes it that more difficult to return fully to community.
    - iii. And then to be courageous together in seeking to be part of healing solutions for our community
4. Jesus healed individuals because he was committed to the healing of communities, to bring people back to community. May we follow in his footsteps.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mark-5-21-43-taking-jesus-seriously\\_b\\_1628498](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mark-5-21-43-taking-jesus-seriously_b_1628498)