



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094
(920)261-2570
A Stephen Ministry Congregation
www.goodshepherdwi.org

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

July 1, 2018

“Restored”
(Mark 5:26)
Rev. David K. Groth

“And there was a woman who had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.” (Mark 5:26).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: Heavenly Father, during His earthly ministry, Your Son Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. By the healing medicine of the word and Sacraments pour into our hearts such love toward You that we may live eternally; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

This is a very sick woman. She's been bleeding for twelve years. For twelve years she's been acutely fatigued, achy, probably depressed. She forces herself to be up and about, but feels like at any point in the day, even right after breakfast, she could crawl into bed and fall right back to sleep. If she has a husband, normal relations are out of the question. He's grown accustomed to her illness and its symptoms, and tries to be compassionate and accommodating, but her illness has had a huge impact on him too, their marriage, their finances, their hopes and dreams. If she has kids, they notice she doesn't laugh or tease or play as much as other moms. She tries; she tries mightily, but the disease often gets the better of her.

She hates this condition and what it has done to her and her marriage and her family. She has tried everything she can think of, beginning with the home remedies. She's also tried the doctors of the day. Mark writes, "She had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse." That's the verse I'd really like to zero in on today. It's not a very flattering picture of 1st century medicine, and it probably makes physicians wince today, because it can also be true of 21st century medicine.

"She suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse." From the onset, I want to be clear: this was not the experience Gail and I had with her medical care. We had very good insurance through it all, and very good medical care too from skilled and compassionate people. When I think back, I'm mostly just thankful to God for the physicians and nurses God sent us and their care for Gail. But I also know many are not nearly as fortunate, and that the surgeries and medicines and therapies can be painful, ineffective, and financially ruinous.

“She had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.” In this era of modern medicine, with all the innovations, especially in pain management, we might be tempted to think death and dying won’t be so bad after all. I called Michael Bernhagen and asked him about this last week. He works at Rainbow Hospice and studies end of life issues in America. He said, “American medicine’s success at fighting disease and extending life has created a new problem. 100 years ago, most of us died rather suddenly. Today most of us die slowly, incrementally, sometimes over a period of years. This increased quantity of life doesn’t necessarily translate into increased quality of life.” So he believes there is often more pain and suffering today because there are now so many more interventions, some of them quite nasty in and of themselves. And because there are more interventions sometimes we linger in our maladies longer than we otherwise would. All this can have an impact on our emotional health, spiritual health, and financial health.

This verse reminds us we should never think of medicine or medical practitioners as some sort of savior. We still the need the Savior whose name is Jesus. Don’t rejoice too much in having found one of the best physicians in the country for your particular malady. I don’t know where all these statistics come from, but so often people tell me they are receiving care from one of the top rated docs in the country, right up here in southern Wisconsin. When I was in St. Louis, based on hearsay, it seems the top docs were all down there. When we lived outside of D.C., that’s where all the best docs had set up shop. If I didn’t know any better, I’d conclude they were following me around! How fortunate I am! But the truth of the matter is, regardless of how confident we are in our doctors, we still need Jesus, the Good Physician.

“She suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.” There’s another way we can look at this verse.

Many Americans are taking renewed responsibility for their own health. Tobacco use is down. The sale of soda is down. Fast food places are offering healthy options. People are more aware of what kind of foods they're putting into their mouths, which is good, right, because it's really an intimate thing . . . to put something outside of us into our mouths and digestive system. That food becomes a part of us. So there's a rise in locally grown, organic super foods. Gym memberships, fit bits, managing our intake of sugar and fat and carbs: all that is good. It's being good stewards of the bodies God has given us. But any good thing can be pressed too far and become a god.

Let me explain. One of the newest idols in the land I think is the false god of wellness. Control over our welfare is a drug that has us all hooked, whether it's the prosperity gospel or simply a sense that our wellness is in our own hands. We've bought into the idea that we can totally control our own well-being . . . that if we exercise self-restraint and join a gym and eat more kale, then we can overcome illness and live long lives. But you see what that does? It dethrones God and puts us in his place. Who needs God if you can control your own wellness? Some of those who are most obsessed with taking great care of their bodies have little room for God in their lives. They fixate on things temporal, while ignoring the things eternal.

As Christians, we don't want to be fatalists. It's not as if we're powerless to do anything to maintain or improve our health. But at the same time, we don't want to live as if it's all up to us, that our well-being is totally in our own hands. So what am I suggesting? Take good care of the body God has given you, while also trusting in him and his will for your life, and for personal wellness. After all, no matter how much we exercise, no matter how well we monitor what we put into our mouths, there will come a time when age catches up to us and the diseases intrude and the gods of control and wellness prove to be false idols carved by human hands.

“She suffered much under many physicians and had

spent all that she had and was no better but rather grew worse.” We could rewrite that: “In her middle years, she suffered much under many personal trainers and in many spin classes, doing many lunges and squats and planks and all manner of free weights, and had spent all that she had on super foods and cosmetic surgeries and gym memberships, and yet, in her elderly years, behold, ‘she was no better, but rather grew worse.’” We still need Jesus. So, by all means, eat well and exercise. But let your trust in Christ be stronger still.

My favorite chef on T.V. is Jacques Pepin. I love his recipes. I also like his subtle sense of humor and irony. In one episode, I think while he was finishing off a dish by stirring, like a good French chef, a few tablespoons of butter into the sauce. In passing, he said, “Everyone wants to die in good health.” Isn’t that the truth! “Everyone wants to die in good health.” But that’s not the way death usually works. We still need Jesus, the Good Physician.

Back to this woman in our text! Mark writes, “She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garments.” Someone had told her about Jesus. Whatever it was, it was enough to convince her that if she could just touch the hem of his robe, she would be made well. It’s a kind of primitive, even magical understanding of the healing Jesus gives, but very generously, Jesus accepts that. He does not reject or deny her approach but even calls it true faith. “Your faith has made you well” he tells her. It seems he’ll take what he can get from us by way of faith, and give back so much more. That too is grace.

Verse 29, “And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.” As much as she knew anything, she knew she was healed. Gone is the relentless fatigue. Gone is lethargy, and she feels a pep she hasn’t felt in over a decade.

I believe miracles like that still happen. Usually, however, God chooses to work through the vocations of people to bring about healing and relief. In some Wisconsin

hospital today, a patient's heart will stop and breathing cease and there will be a code blue and drugs will be injected, and electric shock administered, and the heart will resume beating and lungs will fill with air and eyes flutter open and a woman or man or child will be alive again. And the family will be so grateful to the medical team, as well they should. But is God to be thanked any less? Could it be the doctors were instruments of the Lord's healing? As Christians, we believe all healing is of God, whether miraculous as in this woman's case, or through dramatic, medical intervention, or through a long, slow convalescence . . . all healing ultimately comes from God.

And sometimes God does not give the healing we so desperately seek for ourselves or others. That's when we learn something about faith. That's when we have to come to terms with the same message Jesus spoke to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Just believe." Faith is believing even when there are no miracles. Faith is trusting God even when our fervent requests are not met. Faith is persistence in prayer and praise even when we do not receive what we asked for. Faith is claiming for ourselves the peace and wellness God gives us even as we lay dying. That's what Jesus has already won for us on the cross and already given us through his means of grace.

Think of it this way. Who healed the woman in our text? Jesus. How long did the healing process take? No process; it was an instantaneous miracle. How much did it cost her? Not a penny.

We could say the same of the healing God has given us. Who healed us? Jesus. How long did process take? The righteousness God gives us isn't a process; it's a gift. How much did it cost? It didn't cost us a penny, though he paid the highest price. How did he do it? He stopped this woman's bleeding, but on the cross, he did not stop his own!

One last thing: earlier I said it's good to be mindful about what we put into our mouths because it doesn't get any more personal than that. The food we eat becomes part of us. In John 6, Jesus said, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and

drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Talk about health foods! Not all the Kale, Quinoa or Kelp in the world could deliver that! But we receive that super food right here!

You can think of it also as a medicine. Jesus said, this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. In the Bible, where there is forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation. Therefore, the early church thought of this as a “medicine of immortality, antidote to death.” No other medicine comes close to the medicine we receive right here, because it delivers God’s forgiveness right into our mouths, and that forgiveness delivers salvation! It’s the antidote to death prescribed by the Good Physician himself, the very best doc in all the world!

“She had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.” But then she reached out to Jesus, and from him received not just healing for the body, but peace and wellness for her soul. “Daughter” he said, “your faith has made you well. Go in peace.” Those are the gifts Jesus has for you, a wellness and peace only he can give. Amen.

