

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father
And the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Last week, Jesus and his disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee and a storm comes up and nearly swamps the boat. They cross over to the land of the Gerasenes, gentiles; they crossed a cultural boundary... Jesus casts out a demon, and then they cross back again to the land of Israel. There's a lot of crossing over going on in this part of the text. Appropriate, given how Jesus is crossing so many boundaries.

This morning, we have two healing stories; an older woman and a young girl. An interesting feature about this scripture is its narrative structure. We have a story within a story. Jesus is asked to heal a young daughter, on the way to their home an older woman is healed, and then Jesus continues the journey to the young girl's home.

These two healing stories are full of contrasts and connections that weave the two incidents together. You might say that these two stories taken together broaden our interpretation of each other.

Both stories involve women. The older woman has suffered from the hemorrhage; and by the time Jesus arrives to see the little girl she has passed away. According to Levitical law, both women are not to be touched... The law is concerned about contamination. Jesus crosses another boundary...

And both stories contain elements of desperation. Jairus, the leader of the synagogue is afraid; his daughter is at the point of death. The woman with the hemorrhage has suffered a long time; she's lost everything and is only getting worse. And at the home of Jairus, the little girl has died, and there is much weeping and wailing.

Desperate times for many of them, and again Jesus enters these situations in their fear and hopelessness. And again we hear a refrain that is common in the Gospel of Mark, "Do not fear, only believe." Last week we heard in the story about Jesus stilling the storm, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" Fear is often contrasted with Faith.

I wonder if it might be helpful for us this morning to make a distinction between physical health and spiritual health. Sometimes we are both physically and spiritually healthy at the same time and that's wonderful. But that is not always the case. Sometimes we may be physically healthy, and spiritually scared to death. Like Jairus, the father of this young daughter.

Many years when Kris and I were just married, we lived in an apartment in a tough part of Minneapolis. One summer evening we returned home from a walk and our next door neighbor was coming down the stairs carrying a bike and a bag of electronics.

We were sociable and made small talk about the apartment building, the light was so dim in the stairwell we couldn't see very well. When we got to our apartment, the door was pried open, everything was turned upside down, and both of our bikes, as well as many other things were stolen.

I quickly put two and two together and rushed down the stairs. My hunch was right; our next-door neighbor was actually carrying Kris' bike and a bag of our own personal belongings. I confronted her, and she dropped everything and ran. The police arrived, and they didn't seem to care very much. One of them suggested that if we lived in that neighborhood, we should expect to be victimized.

That night we felt violated, it was our next-door neighbor that had robbed us! Fearing all our neighbors, we stacked a dresser and chairs and anything else we had against the broken door, and we were anxious and scared and worried to death. Our whole world was shaken.

That whole first week we felt trapped, hopeless, vulnerable and desperate. Even though we were physically healthy, we were spiritually broken. We were turned inward on ourselves, we were afraid of our neighbors, and we were trying to lock ourselves away.

Sometimes life is like that. You do everything you're supposed to do, you play by all the right rules, you do all the right things, but sometimes bad things happen. And so it was for the leader of the synagogue, his daughter was dying and for the older women whose physical health was getting worse.

I trust all of you from time to time; have experienced some desperate moments. Perhaps it was brought on by poor physical health; or an accident; perhaps it was the loss of a job; or just plain old bum luck.

There is suffering in our world and try as hard as we might to keep it away; sometimes there is nothing we can do about it. Sometimes fear and anxiety just creep into our lives and it feels like there's very little we can do about it.

So, sometimes we can be physically well and spiritually a wreck. And, sometimes we can be the opposite; we can be physically broken and still be spiritually healthy. And this is important, because let's face it, we are human beings, we are creatures, and there will be a time in our lives when our physical health will fail.

We will experience a sickness unto death; and through Jesus, God makes it possible to even face death, and yet trust in the goodness of His purposes and promises. In this way Jesus crosses another boundary, a boundary separating life and death.

This is exactly how Jesus defeats the power of death. This is a health that is deeper than death. This kind of spiritual health is one of God's greatest gifts to us. And let's never forget that faith comes from God. Try as hard as we might to climb a ladder up to God and receive faith, it is always God who climbs down the ladder to freely give us what we need.

Another way our two healing stories are similar involves the element of touch. The woman with the hemorrhage touches the hem of Jesus garment, and Jesus also touches the hand of the dead girl. Touch is connection; it is both a physical connection and a spiritual connection.

When I was doing my chaplaincy training at Abbot, I was once asked to visit a woman in quarantine. The nurses gave me a lecture on entering and exiting the patient's room; they dressed me up with gloves, a gown and a thing over my head with its own air supply. I looked like a space man. They gave me instructions not to touch anything, and specifically I wasn't supposed to touch the patient.

Once I finally got into this woman's room, it was hard to listen to her words. She was soft spoken, I had this big thing over my head and there was a little fan whirring in my ear. She was hurting and desperate, and she spoke about regrets and fears. She was physically broken and spiritually dead. After awhile, I gave up trying to hear every word and concentrated instead on listening to her facial expressions.

When I realized she was done speaking, I really didn't know what to say, so I mumbled something about saying a prayer. And instinctively she reached out her hand to hold my hand. People often do that. And I remember a moment of hesitation, but then I took her hand, what else can you do? I can't remember anything about the prayer.

But I do remember her expression; her face was beaming, radiant and tearful. And as I left that room, I reflected that it really didn't matter what I said or didn't say; it was all about touching her hand. It was all about making a connection with her.

Touch matters; connecting matters. It is all about relationship. When life beats us up, when we feel desperate, having another hand to hold is like water for a thirsty soul. When I think about church life, its all about the

journey of being together; of relationship, of connecting and including; of being a community, of loving and supporting one another.

Spiritual healing is God's work, our hands. When the gales of suffering and misery threaten to break us and drive us inward and fearful, God is present to take our hand. God reaches out to touch us when we are welcomed into church, when we pass the peace on Sunday mornings. God reaches out to touch us when we greet each other as we leave this sanctuary, or in fellowship. And these days, God even touches our lives when we call one another, text one another or, email one another... Church life is all about connecting and including... Being there for one another...

God touches our lives when we reach out in love.

The good news this morning is that indeed our physical bodies will one day pass away, but we are people of the resurrection, Jesus has crossed the boundary separating life and death. Jesus has conquered death.

And just as he raised a little girl from the dead; so he also takes us by the hand, and he says to us, do not fear, have faith, have hope, have love. In the desperate moments of your life, how has God touched you?

Amen.