



## **BELIEVE**

*People were fortified by Jesus' words and deeds that revealed care for all—especially those marginalized. We strengthen our belief in the possibility for renewed health and vigor for all.*

During the past several weeks, we have been looking at healing miracles in Matthew as a source of inspiration for our need of healing as Holy Vessels, mind, body, and spirit, after a year of pandemic and the life-saving but energy sapping precautions we've lived under. Last week, we had two separate healings in our Scripture text. This week we also have two, but the stories are woven together. We encounter Jesus in the midst of speaking to some of John the Baptist's disciples when our narrative begins.

### **Matthew 9:18-26**

*While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.*

**The word of Life.**

**Thanks Be to God!**

There are several things that would be shocking to Matthew's original audience who were mostly from a Jewish background. One of these would be Jesus coming in physical contact with these people. A woman suffering from prolonged bleeding and a dead body. Because of their different situations, they would both be considered "unclean." They would be set apart, and so would anyone with whom they came in physical contact. So often in modern Christian churches this separation from the community or community life is highlighted as unfair,

legalistic, a way to control and marginalize people who perhaps need the help and support from that community.

However, at their base, these are hygiene rules, and there were very good reasons for them. They were not intended to be legalistic or controlling. In a time before modern medicine with antibiotics, vaccines, and other therapeutics, it was a way to keep the community safe from communicable and sometimes debilitating or deadly illnesses and diseases.

As I was preparing for this week's worship, I read a book published in 2002, almost 20 years ago, about the terrible ordeal of Hoof and Mouth disease that affected livestock in Great Britain. The people did, what seemed at the time, extraordinary things to stop the spread of that horrible disease.

I can't help but make a connection to what we have been living through for a year now. The extraordinary things the world has done to keep people healthy and safe. I just read on Friday where Italy had gone back under a very restrictive lockdown after a severe spike.

It is the one year anniversary from when life made a dramatic shift for all of us in the course of just a few days in the United States due to the COVID pandemic. It goes to show how quickly circumstances can change in ways that you never imagined.

Late February of 2020, I said in my sermon, "Who knows what will happen with this 'coronavirus thing.'" We had worship at the church the first Sunday in March. It wasn't exactly normal. We had a lot of hand sanitizer available for one thing. That next week, the world started shutting down. I was on the fence. Should we try to have one more worship service? Would it be safe? Every day we were getting a clearer picture of how contagious this disease is and how deadly.

At this time, over 530,000 Americans have died. That's a hard number to get your head around and understand the human toll. It's especially difficult in Wallowa County where we just reached our 5th person. When you consider that Wallowa County has only about 7,000 people, it's as if the entire population of the county died 75 times. It's still hard to fully contemplate it. With numbers that big we become desensitized to the individual people and the families who are affected.

So, all of the things that we have done this past year. All the sacrifices we have made. They all were to serve one purpose. It was not for fun. It was not to be controlling, legalistic, or unfair, but to keep our communities safe and healthy. Yet, we lament this long season of separation during this long year. We miss the physical touch of the Body of Christ. How long can we sing the Lord's song in this strange land? (Psalm 137:4) We are starting to see the end, but we are not quite there yet.

We have this picture of what life was like before and what it felt like. It might seem like that picture has been cut up into a jigsaw puzzle with the pieces moved all around. For some of us at times it might have felt like all those pieces were turned upside down, so we couldn't even see the picture at all.



During this past year, we have all experience trauma ... in different ways.

And so, let's return to our Scripture passage. It's all about people experiencing trauma. We have two particular people coming to Jesus, in very different ways, in hopes of addressing their traumas.

We are presented with two very different pictures. We have the grief stricken father who is willing to grasp as straws, willing to give up his dignity as a ruler to not only approach Jesus, but kneel before this itinerant healer to save his daughter.

Then, we have the hemorrhaging woman. She does not have the status to approach Jesus directly like the ruler. She doesn't even speak to him. She just touches the fringe of his outer garment. She is so desperate. She probably hoped to leave as unnoticed as she approached.

We hear the phrase in the Scripture that she was "healed" in verses 21 & 22, and we think nothing of it in this series of healing miracles in Matthew. An interesting thing is that this word that is translated as "heal" can also mean "save," "rescue," or "be made whole." This is not to say that "heal" is incorrect, but let's expand our thinking. Consider healing as a vehicle for rescuing or being made whole. Let me read those verses again changing that word.

*"She [the woman] said to herself, 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be [made whole].' Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter,' he said, 'your faith has [rescued] you.' And the woman was [made whole] at that moment."*

I read that, and I just have to say, "Wow!" It feels so different, so much bigger. Like the difference of slapping a Band-Aid on something and having the wound completely disappear. Healing as the pathway to saving and being made whole. Now, this woman who has been cut off from her community similar to that of the leper we talked about a couple of weeks ago, she can return and participate in that community again. And if you can imagine how debilitating hemorrhaging for 12 years would be. She can have a brand new picture, a different picture of what life can be like. It all makes much more sense to say, "Your faith has rescued you, made you whole." Jesus has given her new life.

You know, we can get hung up in this idea of the idea of having sufficient faith to get the outcome we want when we go to Jesus. That if we don't get it, that means we don't have enough faith or something. I've talked

about this before. And really, that's looking at it from the wrong angle. Douglas Hare puts it this way, we have to have "confidence in God's readiness to save." (Hare, Douglas R. A.. *Matthew: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (p. 106). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.) You have to believe that Jesus *can* rescue you, or maybe it's better to turn that around. What can Jesus do for you if you don't think or not aware that he can do anything? Would you even go to him for help? Would you even recognize the hand that is reaching out to you?

Then, we have the picture of the grieving family. Think of how different the picture became for them. Where this daughter is raised from death, saved from death, given new life. Of course, there is the very interesting thing that Jesus says, "The girl is not dead but asleep." (Mt 9:24) Think of how that description figuratively could apply to us right now. We may feel like life has been drained out of us, but perhaps, we are just sleeping, needing Jesus to wake us up, bringing us back to life. What Jesus tells all of these people in these healings is that no matter what has happened to you so far, it is not the end of the story.

I paraphrase our opening song: God makes beautiful things. God makes beautiful things out of the dust. God makes beautiful things out of us. ("Beautiful Things," Gundor) Out of our shatteredness, brokenness God make something beautiful.

We all have our "before" picture, our picture of life pre-COVID. We have spent this year learning, adapting, trying to make it through however we can. We have tried different things, and some have worked better than others. And, we picture our lives in the future.

Lately, I've been watching old home makeover shows, namely *Curb Appeal the Block*. I loved that show, but in all of the shows in that genre, you have the "before" picture. It might not be so great. It might even be okay. With some of them I even say to myself, "What's wrong with that?" The clients are given a drawing of the planned result, and the usually "Ohhh and Ahhh" over it. But then, there is the time of demolition, the time of tearing the old down and building back the new. It's funny how often the super enthused client who were totally on board in the beginning get a little worried in this phase, and sometimes more than just a little. These past 12 months have been FULL of demolition. We have been in the middle of muck, and we don't like it. It doesn't feel good. It doesn't look pretty, and we're not sure how it's going to turn out. Our jigsaw puzzle is still a bit jumbled.

While we are in this space, we have an opportunity, a chance to consider what we want our "after" picture to look like, both for us as individuals and as a church. Like in those home renovations, what do we need to let go of? What have we done without, and realized that it's okay, maybe even good. In our church building we are taking the opportunity while we can't be there to do some painting and renovate the flooring. Guess what? The pink carpet is gone. In some places the old wood floors have been refinished, and they look beautiful. In other places we are waiting for the new carpet to be installed. The Sanctuary is in that middle phase that frankly doesn't look too pretty, but it is a necessary part of the process to get to something that will work so much better. So, what do we as people need to let go of?

But then there are the things that we have identified as absolutely vital necessities, like our need for each other, the people in our lives. While we do that, remember that God has a say in that too. As we emerge from this time of trauma and destruction, knowing, remembering, and having faith that God makes beautiful thing out of the dust. God makes beautiful things out of us.

We need that, we need the healing and new life after the trauma we have all experienced this past year. Like these two females, the details of our stories vary due to our unique situations and circumstances, but that does not alter our very real need of healing, of saving, of being made whole.

Jesus puts the pieces of our broken lives back together in a beautiful mosaic, reconstructs the jigsaw of our lives. Do you like to do jigsaw puzzles? They have become VERY popular during the pandemic. I have several friends that post pictures of the puzzles they're working on. Our Mike Williams has done so many. I remember some very intricate ones he's worked on where the pieces are so small that the end result is a beautiful mosaic picture. It's called Diamond Art. You can see the tiny pieces that have to be separated out and arranged intricately. This wolf picture is the one that stands out the most in my mind. Think of that kind of care and precision Jesus used as he puts our lives back together, makes us whole, gives us new life. That is only the beginning.



Our new life begins now, and every day when we wake up we are reborn. Each day leads us to a time and place where the complete hope will be realized. Our brokenness will be gone, and we will be forever whole. Now, that's a different picture, an amazing one.

Amen!