

## Go in peace and be healed

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Psalm 6:1-5  
Isaiah 57:15-19  
Mark 5:21-43

When Cecilia was young I wanted to tell her Bible stories but I didn't want to start with the usual stories that children are told: the wrathful God of Genesis that drowns the whole world or the scary story of Daniel in a room full of hungry lions. Instead I told healing stories, starting with the woman with the flow of blood. Bleeding, perhaps not hemorrhaging, but bleeding is something children understand and can sympathize with.

Cecilia loved this story as much as I do. Telling the story night after night became part of our bedtime routine. One evening, impatient with my telling of the story Cecilia finished it herself: "The woman reached out and touched Jesus' clothes and then she was healed. And then they laughed and hugged each other."

What a wonderful image, captured perfectly by a child. She intuitively understood that the healing was a restoration to wholeness. This nameless woman was anxious not only for physical healing but for emotional contact as well. The bleeding she had experienced for 12 years had drained her body of energy and drained her pockets of funds. It had exhausted many doctors – they had no idea how to help her.

But this bleeding is not just a cut on her finger; this is the blood of women. Perhaps she had a difficult pregnancy, or a miscarriage, or a cyst. Whatever caused the illness the effect was that she was unclean. Jewish law was strict about a woman's blood. She could not be in and among the community with this ceaseless flow of blood.

From [Leviticus 20:18](#) *If a man has intercourse with a woman suffering from a hemorrhage, both of them must be cut off from the community, because he exposed the source of her flow, and she allowed him to do it.*

Whether or not the law was actually observed this strictly is another matter but we can see that this woman was desperate. She was probably living on the edge emotionally, economically, spiritually and physically. Healing her would restore her to the community.

Three-year-old Cecilia instinctively understood this and in her version of the story we see the healing extended through laughter and a hug. Biblical scholars tell us the clue in the text to the woman's restoration is how Jesus addresses her after she is healed. He calls her "daughter." She is part of the family again. She is no longer on the outside of the community, no longer unclean. She is now a daughter in the faith and Jesus is her father.

The daughter language also calls us back to the other story in which we find ourselves. Jairus, a religious leader, is the father of a very sick 12-year-old girl. Do you catch the connection between these two nameless women in the stories? The woman has been bleeding 12 years and the girl is 12 years old, probably not yet bleeding in the way of women. While family has surrounded the girl in her life and now in her death, the older woman was probably abandoned by her family for the past 12 years. Jesus comes onto the scene and somehow, by faith, the women are restored to health and to community.

The past weeks we have been looking at healing stories from the gospel of Mark, trying to understand what healing means. In each of these stories we have heard that the healing is not merely physical. It is a restoration – Jesus asking the blind man what he wants Jesus to do for him, Jesus telling the man to stretch out his hand, and now the woman with the flow of blood and the 12-year-old girl. They are restored to family, to community, restored to themselves, restored to God in a new way. As part of this series on healing we have had the

opportunity to participate in anointing and healing prayer each week. I wonder what your experiences have been. Have you experienced any kind of restoration?

The idea of healing and restoration is not only for the Jewish community of Jesus' day. Mennonite Church USA has a statement called Vision: Healing and Hope. It may sound familiar.

*"God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world."*

Putting a statement like this into action takes many forms. Rainbow Mennonite Church in Kansas City housed and sponsored a Children's Defense Fund Freedom School this past summer. The "Freedom School program advances literacy, promotes cultural enrichment and empowers children and their families. The program immerses its young scholars in an integrated reading curriculum that features vast multicultural titles." (from MCUSA website) Joel Goering, Peter and Sara's son, was the project coordinator. Through reading books, singing songs and learning new languages children and their families are restored to each other, to their history and to the larger community.

The efforts of **this** congregation are part of the healing and hope vision. The work that Jubilee Association is doing with developmentally disabled adults, the conference planned by the Anabaptist Peace Center, our relationship with our sister church in Colombia, the Ten Thousand Villages Sale – these are all ways that we are part of God's bringing healing and hope to the world.

Sometimes healing and restoration come unexpectedly. MCUSA recently accepted an apology from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America for the persecution done to Anabaptists in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. While we may wonder at this request for forgiveness across continents and centuries MCUSA Executive Director, Jim Schrag, responded this way:

*"We pray that God will use this gesture to release both Lutherans and Mennonites from a past that may have bound us in ways we did not even know."  
(MCUSA website)*

Conversations that seek healing are also underway between Mennonites and the Vatican. Mennonite World Conference tells us that German Mennonites and German Catholics are working at reconciliation with peace as a means and an end. In a personal way, Bridgefolk annually brings "sacramentally-minded Mennonites and peace-minded Roman Catholics together to celebrate each other's traditions, explore each other's practices, and honor each other's contribution to the mission of Christ's Church." (from Bridgefolk.net) Bridgefolk meets in the U.S. and now also in Colombia as Catholics and Mennonites gather to worship and learn, seeking commonality in peace and prayer.

At the international level we see the important work of healing that Mennonite Central Committee and others are doing to increase dialogue with Iranian leaders even as the U.S. government tries to demonize the people of Iran.

All of these examples are reasons to celebrate. Restoration through healing is still happening among followers of Jesus. In these situations we are witnesses and see that peace is possible, that healing and hope can be a reality. How do we as people who believe in healing hold out hope in broken relationships? What does faith in Jesus' power look like in our own lives, in this congregation?

It is a rather large omission to talk about healing without mentioning our own broken relationship with the Allegheny Conference. It has been almost two years since the conference delegates voted to take away the votes of Hyattsville delegates to conference and MCUSA because we welcome lesbian and gay Christians as members here. We have continued to be involved with the conference, sending delegates to meetings and attending the MCUSA gathering

in San Jose. Our votes may not count but our voices are not silenced. What will healing look like in this situation?

A feminist theologian from India, Anna Vareed Alexander, writes about the woman who reached out to touched Jesus' clothes. Vareed Alexander understands what it means for the hemorrhaging woman to be unclean. Being untouchable is a familiar concept in India. Though the woman is unclean she reaches out to touch the hem of Jesus cloak. Vareed Alexander notes that "At the hem of every Jewish male's garment were fringes (Numbers 15:38) tied there to remind him of The Law, the same Law which condemned Jewish women to lifelong embarrassment because of their normal life-giving bodily functions." (p.44 – Biblical Women: Our Foremothers – Women's Perspectives) By reaching out to touch this fringe the woman reminds Jesus of the law and at the same time challenges the law. His response is to break that law – by interacting with her and to free her from the law – by healing her.

Mark tells us that Jesus heals both of these women; the woman who lives on the edge of the religious community and Jairus' daughter, daughter of the leader of the synagogue. Jesus walks the path between these two women. He does not walk a "fine line" between the two, balancing on a high wire, as we so often try to do in difficult situations. No, Jesus walks right into the lives of each woman. He responds directly to the touch of the woman. He goes to the house of Jairus.

As followers of the Jesus way we are invited to walk the path Jesus walked. We live and worship as religious outcasts as it were, at the edge of the larger church. Like the unclean woman we reach out to touch the fringed law, in hope that there might be justice and healing. Yet we persist in going to the conference, to the house of the leaders, to participate in life there. We know from Jesus' own story that walking at the edge and walking toward the center is not easy or safe.

As members of Mennonite Church USA we are reminded that God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world. May we receive God's healing, allowing it to flow through us to the world. Let us follow the path to restoration that Jesus walked, so that we too can hear his words, "Child of God, your faith has made you whole; go in peace."