Wounded Healing: Finding Spiritual Balance in a Needy World
A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
June 30, 2024
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It was one heck of a day, for Jesus. Prior to today's story, in Mark's Gospel, Jesus has had one long and busy day: he preached to the masses; out in a boat on the Sea of Galilee a storm brews, and Jesus, asleep, is oblivious as the rest in the boat panic. Jesus awakens, as if on waking on a lazy summer morning, and orders the storm to stop. It stops. He then heals a demon-possessed person, then *again* sets out in the boat with his friends to go to the other side, and, upon landing on shore, is pressed upon by crowds of people again, likely many who have heard of his healings and teachings.

There is so much in today's story to unpack. However, I am going to resist the temptation. I will point at a few things that I notice in today's story.

In the chaos of making his way among the hordes of people, Jesus' cloak is touched, healing flows from him into an unnamed woman, but a woman who has the courage to reach out to him. She is healed of her bleeding condition – *but that was only part* of the healing she would receive. Jesus wants to find the person into which healing flowed from him – she again courageously presents herself. She didn't have to. *Will he chastise her?* No, he commends her faith, says that it was her openness to healing that made her well. This is a *whole, holistic, healing*, and one she has sought out for herself.

In contrast to the woman suffering from bleeding for 12 years, Jesus is approached by an authoritative leader in the community who does have the privilege of being named. Jairus pleads with Jesus to come and heal his 12-year-old daughter. Mark loves drawing contrasts – with name and authority, but, Jairus is so desperate that he humbles himself publicly before Jesus for his daughter. It is an intriguing contrast: the woman who touched Jesus was of low social status, yet boldly approaches Jesus, with the powerful named man who humbles himself in his plea to Jesus.

Jesus makes his way to the home of the young woman, through the gossipy friends of Jairus scoffing, telling Jairus, the father, that it is too late, the girl is dead, Jesus is too late. Enslaved African Americans of the 19th century sang, "God may not come when you call him, but he'll be there

right on time!"[1] Sure enough, Jesus simply speaks and the girl awakens, and he insists that she get some nourishment.

As I said, a long day, and, we should remember, Jesus is very human. Did he groan? Did he quietly mutter, unbeknownst to the disciples, "When will this day end?" We will never know. But, I'm going to imagine Jesus having little moments of weakness. Perhaps, pushing through the petty friends of Jairus and the young woman, he pushed with just a little extra roughness in a moment of un-Jesus like weakness.

Mark is presenting a long, long day here and Jesus is surrounded by suffering. Times have not changed from that ancient time to our modern one. We have days like this one – where the negativity, the pain, the tragedy and unfairness can make us feel hopeless. And we are *not* Jesus. We cannot just order injustice to stop, and it listens.

But we *can* infer that Jesus probably felt the tiredness, the temptation to lose hope, to want to change direction, perhaps break away from these needy disciples following him everywhere, to run and hide. So, I wonder today: Why didn't Jesus take a moment somewhere in this long day according to Mark to do some self care – to go away somewhere quiet and pray?

My message title reference to the *Wounded Healer* is a nod to author, theologian, activist, Henri Nouwen, who spent the later years of his life in a L'arche community north of Toronto. His seminal book, "The Wounded Healer"[2] speaks of the need to enter into another person's pain, to journey with them and, often, facing the challenges of feeling their pain of suffering and even death.

How can we be agents of God's healing, *yet always being mindful* of seeking our own healing and rest, and restoration along the way?

I remember professors in my theology program constantly reminding ministers-in-training that we are not "Messiahs" – we cannot, and must not, set out to save people as clergy. But, we were often eager to learn the skills of listening, of being present with parishioners, of preaching award-winning sermons. We would, unfortunately, *practice* counselling on each other, sometimes with unhelpful results. This is the opposite of what Henri Nouwen means when he calls us to be wounded healers.

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[1] Emerson Powery, Commentary on Mark 5:21-43. Working Preacher July 1, 2012. Found at workingpreacher.org. I had misquoted this in the actual Message, my apologies. (Dave)

[2] Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in a Contemporary Society.* © 1979 Random House Inc.

We are not Jesus. *Jesus may not have been Jesus!* Remember that Mark presents Jesus in a particular way, a way that reflects Mark's vision and memory of Jesus.

Jesus hardly did anything. The bleeding woman did all the work! Jesus just spoke and the young woman was raised. To me, that is a reminder that our needy world, needy people. Seemingly hopeless situations that absorb our lament and compassion, will suck our energy, our hope, our passion, if we don't pay attention to our own need for healing.

Sometimes the greatest healing that I have offered has not been in the most painful moments, but it is has been as a byproduct of something I was not aware I was doing. For example: I held open a door leaving the mall for a kind lady who proceeded to offer me a hearty "thank you!" She seemed almost surprised that I did that, probably because that gesture is not taught from parent to child as much as it used to. In the same vein – kind words, challenging gossip with compassion. Sometimes, walking away from the fray, the busy-ness, the chaos of life, to recharge our spiritual batteries. We are not Jesus. Maybe Jesus was not the Jesus portrayed by Mark.

So, friends, let us be healers, but healers not just of others, but also of ourselves. Amen.