

Caring for Those Who Suffer Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time/B June 28, 2015
9:00 AM Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24; 2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15; **Mk 5:21-43** (Everyone who believes in Christ is called to be part of that process of bringing healing to people.)

“Jesus said to the synagogue official, ‘Do not be afraid; just have faith’”

One thing never changes: illness is always frightening, whether it’s cancer, heart disease, MS, Parkinson’s, **illness is frightening**. Even though today there are some wonderful and effective therapies and medications, the fact that we are not well takes away the illusion that we are in charge of our lives, that we can control, that we can even care for ourselves as we want to. So Jesus begins with, “Don’t be afraid,” because **Jesus embodies a care and a love that goes beyond what we can provide**. These stories are meant to model **a new way of facing illness for the believing community, for those who follow Christ**.

The first thing that the gospel tells us is that **Jesus identified with people who suffer**. This itself was strange. Ordinarily the teachers, the priests, the rabbis did not identify with those who suffered. In fact they distanced themselves from those who suffered. I cannot speak authoritatively about other religions on this topic, but **I doubt it’s very common for people with authority and power to identify with those who suffer**.

Right before these two episodes we heard about today, there was another one where **Jesus delivered a man who suffered from very oppressive and dark forces**. Now today we are very sophisticated; we don’t think in terms of demons or spirits, but we have to admit we can hardly do better than the ancients in really helping the truly distressed or oppressed or obsessed people. We have medications that may help symptoms, but they don’t really cure anything, and we know that. But Jesus did. **He healed the whole person: body, mind, soul**. He restored integrity. And that he intended to be the beginning of something ongoing in the world, **his mission begun in him but carried on through his disciples to the end of time through whom he would continue to work**. “I shall be with you all days until the end of the world,” he said. And we have to take all this very seriously. His ability and his willingness to heal and to restore **included every kind of ailment and affliction**: physical, such as hemorrhages; what we would call birth defects or handicaps; also mental illness; emotional disorders; and then those things we can’t even describe: the dark edges of the soul. And being himself so confident in the goodness of God and his Father’s good-will toward all of the creation, **he was able to calm fears and instill hope and tranquility in others**. Jesus’ whole point was that **his followers had to continue this work, each in our own way**.

Now if you think about any illness, **there are so many different elements of a healing process**. I broke my leg several years ago. It’s astonishing how many people I needed in order to get better. I needed two doctors, several nurses, all kinds of helpers who came into my house to help me since I live alone, all kinds of people preparing food, all kinds of drivers to take me to the doctor and to the hospital, and a place to stay after the operation. It’s really a list; it’s an entire typed page of names. Now that’s just for a broken leg, and that’s nothing. Every other illness requires just as many or more people to participate. And **everyone who believes in Christ is called to be part of that process of bringing healing to people**.

And it starts with caring in the first place. Jesus cared about people. He taught first and foremost that his mission would be carried out by those who cared, cared enough to do something. And in fact he taught that **by caring we actually become like God.** We are made in the image and likeness of God, and we actually become that image when we care, when we show concern for other people. And when we don't, that image becomes disfigured and distorted and corrupted. And so **he taught his disciples to look at life through the lens of those who suffer.** If we feel inadequate because we don't have any professional expertise, don't worry. **There's always room for expertise, but there's also room for the person who just sits and listens to the person who suffers.**

It has become acceptable, unfortunately, in our world to question the plausibility of the existence of God, even more so the plausibility of a God who is love. Well, this is a very dire situation because if people don't believe in God, they also don't believe in love in the true sense. They may believe in some human affection, which we know is very frail and passing. **But if they don't believe in God who is love and who has concern for his creation, then they miss the very essential message of Jesus.** How can we help? **How can we evangelize a doubting, disbelieving world? The answer is by taking up the same work of Christ: looking at life from the viewpoint of those who suffer, extending to the afflicted our genuine concern.** If God is love, and the gospels proclaim that that's true, and if people do not believe in God, then they really are disbelieving in love, which explains a lot about the world today and why it is the way it is.

Now why is this? Perhaps it's due to the dominance of selfishness, or maybe the indifference displayed toward them in their need. In any case, **every act of kindness, every selfless gift is a form of evangelization.** And if through the selfless goodness of people the hardhearted unbelievers start to believe in love, then they are no longer truly unbelievers. They are on the path to the discovery of God. So this reading of Scripture suggest that **the work Jesus gave us of spreading his message and his work begins simply with caring, with encouraging trust and confidence in God.** Can we do this? It may not always be easy. It will surely at times open us to ridicule. Jesus was ridiculed at the house of Jairus, but he did not lack confidence in what he knew of God, of the Father, and so he didn't allow it to stop him from bringing the gift of life to that little girl. **So we needn't possess miraculous powers to instill trust in others. God's power will be released when everything is right, when people are ready.** That's the story of the woman with the hemorrhage. Everyone was pressing on Jesus, but only one was cured, **the one who touched him intentionally, wanting something from him, and believing it would come.** Weekly we approach Christ in his body and blood in the sacrament of the altar, in the Holy Eucharist; but **do we touch him with intentional faith that can bring us healing in mind and soul and body?** That's the question the gospel asks us to be with this morning.