

A RAINBOW OF HEALING

Mark 5: 21-43; June 27, 2021; Union Congregational United Church of Christ

Rev. Robin Raudabaugh

A healing within a healing. Jesus the multitasker. Jesus was on his way to respond to the request of an influential synagogue official to lay hands on his desperately ill little daughter when he finds himself waylaid by a woman who has suffered from hemorrhaging for twelve years. This woman had heard of Jesus' miracles of healing and had no intent to stop Jesus or even ask for healing but had convinced herself that merely touching his cloak could bring about her healing – and it did – immediately. However, the pause caused by the bleeding woman's healing – and Jesus' statement that it was her faith that brought about her own healing – slowed the rush to the sick child – and while Jesus was still talking to the woman, word came that it was too late, the child had died. And yet, Jesus continued on his way to bring healing to the child.

We cannot help but read scripture stories like these in Mark's gospel without wondering about the nature of healing. What exactly does it mean to be healed? Is it Jesus that heals in these stories, or is it the faith of the ones in need of healing? We still have so many questions about what it means to be healed when we are ill. And these are not only faith questions but are ubiquitous among human beings. Almost all of us by the time we reach our young adulthood have experienced some kind of illness or ailment – physical, spiritual, psychological or interpersonal. We ache for healing and wholeness. And we wonder at our times of illness whether we will be one of the 'lucky ones' who will experience healing - or whether we will not.

Over the past year it has been impossible not to be hyper-aware of our world's need for healing: from Covid19 and all its variants, from racism and ethnic injustice, from over policing, from global warming and climate change, from attacks on LGBTQ people, from attacks on our country's democracy....

In Mark's story, a desperate woman plagued by years of an illness that in our present time might easily be healed with modern medicines, is made well simply by her belief that touching the cloak of Jesus can bring about her healing. This woman is healed, but so many throughout history are not healed.

A little child is pronounced dead and yet, when Jesus calls her to wake up, she does. What do these stories mean for us and for our country and our world's desperate need for healing on so many levels?

Right now, in this very congregation we have folks undergoing treatments for a variety of cancers, treatment for broken bones, treatment for hearts and lungs, pancreas and kidneys, skin and bones, mental health. We have people struggling with broken family relationships, with broken friendships, with broken trust between neighbors. We have people naming our country as sick, as broken, as in need of healing. In this very congregation, we are in need of healing.

Oh, that it might be so simple as to call on Jesus for a miracle – for miracles all around! Oh, that we might have such faith that if we could simply believe that Jesus could bring about healing, it would make it so.

For the entire month of June our country has been celebrating PRIDE month – an entire month lifted up to celebrate and affirm in a rainbow of healing and hope – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer human beings and their allies. I have sometimes heard it asked why there needs to be a PRIDE celebration for gay people – after all there isn't a STRAIGHT celebration for everyone else. The response to that wondering – that question – is the same as wondering why we simply cannot say "All Lives Matter" instead of "Black Lives Matter" because in this time we must know that LGBTQ lives are not universally celebrated just as we must know that over and over black lives continue to not matter.

Our need for healing is not simply for physical healing. Jesus knew this and certainly had some understanding of the stigma and trauma of chronic illness. It is also true that ongoing systemic injustices wrought on specific peoples and populations cause physical as well as psychological illness. Our need for healing is central to a life of faith, a life of acting on our belief in a God of unconditional love, a life of living into our belief that all people and all creation have intrinsic value and are beloved by God.

On this PRIDE Sunday here at Union Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, may we celebrate and remember our need for healing and unconditional love for our LGBTQ siblings – as - we celebrate and remember our need for healing and unconditional love for all our wider family of God's beloved.

PRIDE Sunday in our progressive church is never meant to be one single day – but one day to remind us to take PRIDE in supporting and affirming our LGBTQ family and friends and strangers every day – that we may be a rainbow of hope in a world sorely in need of more rainbows.

For our fragmented, divided, storm-tossed world still reeling from pandemic – the rainbow is a sign of hope. For communities that embrace and affirm the spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity, the rainbow is a sign of welcome, pride and justice.

For many people of faith, the rainbow is also a sign of the ongoing and enduring relationship between the Holy and humankind. We remember that according to the book of Genesis, God said to Noah, “This is a sign of the covenant between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations. I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

In God’s sight all humankind is a rainbow people! We are a many and splendidly diverse people – in color and culture, sexuality and gender, ability and language – shining together in health and wholeness under the arching colors of divine love!

[As I name the color you are wearing, I invite you to move to the outside of the sanctuary – keeping some distance between you – creating blocks of color as we surround this space with a rainbow of healing and hope.]

RED The color of ripe strawberries and raspberries. The color of roses and valentines. Of blood and wine. Sweet and hot. Passionate and spirit filled. The color of the life that flows through our bodies. Red.

God of life we thank you for every breath we take, for the blessings and challenges of right-relationships of all kinds. For love is love is love – configured in myriad ways. Empower us to shape a world where love may flourish, where children are cherished, where diversity is held as a high value.

ORANGE The color of pumpkins and oranges and dancing flames. Warmth and compassion. Bright and enlivening. The color of healing. Orange.

God of healing we trust that you are at work healing our bodies and our minds, our neighborhoods and our nations to bring health and restoration.

Hold all who live with hunger, loneliness, grief, illness, danger, or fear. Root out our indifference and complacency and plant in us the strength to be compassionate and just.

YELLOW The color of lemons and lemonade. Sunshine and joy. Radiant and bold, the color of hope. Yellow.

God of hope, we bless you for creation's unfolding, for mysteries around us and the potential for good within us as we live with faith, forgiveness and generosity. Grow these graces within us, that we may be channels of your transforming power.

GREEN The color of birch leaves and spruce bows. New growth. Calm and abundant, the color of nature. Green.

God of the universe, we rejoice in the splendors and sustenance of our planet – its woods and waters, fields and forests, mountain tops and valleys and all that lives and moves and has its being upon and in it. Give us wisdom to act with care and respect for this earthly home.

BLUE The color of summer sky and mountain ridge. A bluebird's wing and a boundary waters lake. The color of depth and inspiration, soaring and fluent, the color of harmony. Blue

God of harmony, we know you intend for our differences to enrich us rather than divide us. Help us to listen and learn from one another. Help us to bring down the barriers of prejudice and privilege and raise up bridges of understanding. Set our hearts on peace and give us courage in the struggle for shalom.

PURPLE The color of lupines and grape jelly. Spring lilacs and fall plums. Strength and dignity. Profound and majestic, the color of spirit. Purple.

God, eternal Spirit, we thank you for all who came before us blazing paths of equity and community. Thank you for those who in word and action respond to your call to love kindness, do justice and walk humbly with you. Eternal Spirit we praise you. May the promise of your rainbow of healing and hope spread over us, as you send us into this world to be your spirited rainbow people! Today and always. May it be so.