

Our gospel lesson this morning is one of the stories of Jesus that shows his healing power. We all would like better health... In a recent discussion with clergy colleagues, almost everyone had a story about massage or Reikki, where touch seemed to have some healing transfer of energy. We would like more “power” or strength in life. Think of the “hour of power” TV worship, where the focus was always on more courage or inspiration... (Ken Medema was often the guest musician, since his songs often move from pain or suffering to courage and power!) The answer to healing from our gospel story may seem simple: like this woman, we should seek out the One who has a reputation for being a healer. But a closer look at the story tells us something very interesting about the healing. Jesus did not really do anything, nor did he even see her come up from behind to touch his cloak. Jesus is not the main actor; the woman is the main actor in this story!

Imagine for a moment what it must have been like to be a woman at that time with some sort of constant bleeding, for 12 years! She probably would have been a bit of an outcast, given all their antiquated notions of clean and unclean. She had visited many doctors and spent all her savings; she could not keep that up! She must have been fairly desperate to try anything... so she hears of some guy named Jesus who has apparently healed many people and she joins the crowd of people following him.

Note again that Jesus did not actually do anything, the healing came through the woman’s own faith and trust and hope in being near to Jesus the healer. They did not even meet face to face or touch hand to hand; she came up from behind him and merely touched the edge of his coat! She was reaching out with an insistent faith, a very active hope, and Jesus does say to her that “her faith” has made her well. We know that humans never have perfect health into old age. And we know that being sick does not imply one has no faith or deficient faith. But Jesus does affirm, in at least a couple of healings, that faith is a healing power.

I'm reminded of the continual healing that happens in 12 step programs, as people confess faith in a "higher power." I say Halleluiah, but add, why not call on Jesus as your higher power; after all, he does have quite a track record. One story in the booklet "*These Days*" tells of an older woman in a dementia unit who read a simple book on the life of Jesus over and over to residents and visitors. Something about his life and teachings carries a power all of its own... that somehow even reading about his life and teachings is enlivening, inspiring, healing.

The power in Jesus' life and teachings is not always for physical healing. Beyond the physical, Jesus brings the healing of the heart, the ability to forgive, the courage to rise up even after falling or being beaten down. African American or Negro spirituals and poetry usually carry a special power in them, precisely because of the experience of being beaten down for so many years. In the United Church of Christ, we often find our best or most powerful speakers among our black preachers. Some of the most enduring and powerful songs or hymns were written by people who had suffered much. Who can forget that "*Amazing Grace*" was written by one who suffered so much guilt for his slave trading? There is real power in the forgiveness or grace of God. Who can forget the composer of "*Abide with Me*" having lost his wife and daughters in a sinking ship? There is real power in the comforting presence of God.

And what about the courage of spiritual songwriters who were blind? Ken Medema will be coming to us next Palm Sunday. Fanny Crosby lost her sight at 6 years old, and beginning in her forties, penned over 8,000 hymns of faith including our opening hymn this morning. She writes with the persistent spirit of the woman with 12 years of bleeding: "*Pass me not, O gentle Savior!*" It is the persistent voice of our Psalm writer as well: "I cry to you, hear my voice! I wait for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning." ... Persistence, intentionality in one's prayer.

We learn from many a teacher that some songs and prayers, in their original intent, are meant to be said loudly... I cry out to thee, "Lord answer my prayer! Kyrie, Eleison! Lord, have mercy!!!" "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, GIVE US this day our daily bread, and DELIVER US from evil!!!!" (Remember, as a vivid reminder, that the

woman with the bleeding was in a large crowd, following Jesus from behind, trying to catch up, hoping, believing that if she even touched the hem of his garment, that she could be healed). Imagine again the intentionality, the focus, the persistence in her reaching out, in her seeking, in her desperate plea.

So we are given a model for our own prayers. Can we be so persistent, so focused, getting near to Jesus, so that even the edge of his spirit might lend us some power, so that even the fringe of his garment could be comforting and inspiring, so that even one teaching of his could sink deep into our heart like a seed forming deep roots?

One of the most powerful teachings of Jesus may be that those who humble themselves will be exalted (and vice versa). Prayer is indeed humbling ourselves. It is acknowledging that we cannot go it alone, that we are not masters of our own fate, and that there are guiding forces in the universe beyond our control. We remember that Paul made a big point to say that he came in weakness, so that the surpassing power of God would be evident... Prayer is the stance or posture of humility, of having needs, of being vulnerable, so that we find our healing with the support of others, and with the support of a higher power. Truly, when we humble ourselves, God can exalt, give new courage, and strengthen our faith to “keep on keeping on.”

So I'd like to close with Ken Medema's very simple prayer song...and sing it a few times, like a chant, so that we really feel the words and the posture of asking for help. Notice that the closing verse is “Send us love, send us POWER, send us grace.”

*Lord, listen to you children praying,*

*Lord, send your spirit in this place,*

*Lord, listen to your children praying,*

*Send us Love, Send us Power, Send us Grace! (Amen!)*