

Proper 8-B  
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St. John's Cathedral

I think it would be safe to say that most of us enjoy hearing healing stories. Often they have happy endings and when they don't there is usually a window that opens for us to see a healing that we hadn't perceived. Sometimes even death can be a healing experience.

I've enjoyed reading a collection of the personal experiences of Rachel Naomi Remen, a physician who specializes in cancer treatment, for just that reason. She can find a spiritual connection in her stories of patients, even when it doesn't look like a happy ending. She moved among her patients as a listener and a healer, always aware that she was in some way in the presence of the divine.

Certainly as a priest I've been present in the midst of many healing stories. Sometimes they even have surprise endings. One I often remember is from when I served here as canon pastor in the 1980s and 1990s. An older man who was a member of the parish had a massive heart attack while mowing his lawn. He was taken to the hospital in critical condition – not expected to live. That evening I sat with the family as the physician who was treating him suggested that they might consider taking him off life support.

That was not a decision they were prepared to make that night and they agreed to come back early in the morning to see how things were going and possibly prepare to make a difficult choice.

I arrived early to be with them and got to the hospital before the family arrived. I went into his room and was astonished to see him sitting up in bed,

having breakfast and reading the paper, while still connected to all sorts of monitors and IVs. “What took you so long to get here?” he asked. Needless to say, the next thing we did was pray a prayer of thanksgiving for his life – a life that that he saw in a new way as pure gift.

Today we heard two healing stories from Mark’s gospel. They are, in effect, a healing story within a healing story, both involving women.

The story begins with a great emergency—a leader of the synagogue begging Jesus to come to his home where his daughter was at the point of death. He literally falls down before Jesus to make this request that Jesus lay hands on her. It is a profound act, probably of both faith and desperation – an urgent reaching out to Jesus who was known to be a healer.

As they set out, a huge crowd swirled around them and in that crowd was a woman who had suffered from hemorrhages for a dozen years. That condition would have made her unclean according to Jewish law and a bit of an outcast.

She took the bold step of touching Jesus’ cloak, believing that she would be healed and she was. But she also took the risk, in touching Jesus’ cloak, of making him unclean as well.

Jesus noticed that someone touched him and asks who it was. The woman, fearing she would be in some kind of trouble for touching him, is afraid. But instead of rebuking her, Jesus calls her ‘daughter’ and says. “your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

We have to wonder here how Jairus was feeling after having this crisis-driven trip to his house and his dying daughter interrupted. If you’ve ever had to

wait for an ambulance or brought a very sick family member to an emergency room only to wait for a long time, you can imagine what he was feeling. And then news came from his home that his daughter had died.

Understandably there was weeping and commotion -- literally weeping and wailing -- at the house when they arrived. If this story had audio, we would probably be in tears with them. That high emotion, deep lament, was typical of that culture.

But when Jesus entered the house, he took the parents with him (and not the crowd) and declared that the girl was not dead, but sleeping. "Little girl, get up!" he says. And she did.

Jesus had intervened with healing touch, taking the girl's hand. There have been many ways of explaining why or how this happened -- how Jesus was able to heal her. For instance she might have had a seizure or a sleep disorder.

But that's not the point. The point is that the power of God comes into our most painful places. Into our places of grief and loss, our places of lament and helplessness; into our paces of sickness and fear. God enters those places and touches us, bringing a kind of healing to our brokenness, however we experience it.

Every week when we gather for our Sunday liturgy, we remember loved ones in prayer who are ill. At this service, we pray, "We most humbly beseech the of thy goodness, O Lord, to comfort an succor all those who in this transitory life are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity." In that prayer we remember those who have asked for our prayers and probably also, in silence remember some of our friends and family members who are not on the list that is

read. When my daughter was undergoing some serious medical treatment this past winter, this was a powerful time of the liturgy for me.

I have also served in parishes where, after receiving communion, people could go to a side chapel area for additional prayers with someone designated for that ministry.

Despite the formality of our liturgical language, we're a little like the leader of the synagogue who approached Jesus, asking him to come to heal his daughter – or the woman with hemorrhages who reached out and touched his cloak. We pray in expectation that – with open hands and open hearts – Jesus will be with those for whom we pray and with us.

That's the good news. That's the healing story in which we live day-to-day. God is with us.