

Face To Face with the God of Life

Mark 5:21-43 (24-34)

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,” because Christ has anointed you to bring healing to the nations. Matthew 28:19 and Luke 4:18.

Many Cinema and motion pictures depict the ancient world as a beautiful and nostalgia time in which to live. When you look at one of those movies, you might wish that you could have lived during those idyllic times. Nevertheless, the reality was far from that depiction. Picture a time in which there were no common sewers; no flushing toilets; dead animals and dead people were everywhere; food was displayed, cooked and sold in the open air; flies, fleas, ticks, mosquitoes and flying insects were alighting on everything and everybody, sanitation was nil, people lived with and dies from all kinds of diseases and the drinking water was either polluted or stagnated. A dreaded plague was always an imminent danger. That was the world during the time of Christ. Granted, the Hebrews because of their purity rites had a better grasp on sanitation, but Palestine was not much better for the common people.

Into this kind of world, the Christian religion came and spread rapidly. Certainly evangelism, miracles and communal caring played a large part. But, the Christian idea of embracing life and communal living on earth played a great part also. The love of Christ inspired people to hold material things in common and to share their goods and their lives. Nursing people’s infectious diseases, feeding the poor, abstaining from unhealthy social behavior and practices and a cleaner and a more health environment were the byproduct of Christianity which helped it to be attractive to many and to grow rapidly. People came Face to Face with the God of Life in their every day living in a new way.

I. The Healing of Lucy

Because we live in the modern world where there are medical marvels and sanitary packaging of goods and services from around the world, it is easy to be Face To Face with the God of Life and not to notice or acknowledge it. During the early 1970s, I worked with a man named Donald whose wife, Lucy was sick for as long as I had known them. In 1973, she was critically ill at the University hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas. I had been to see her two days earlier and Alice and I visited with her and her family on Christmas morning after the Eucharist.

When we arrived, Don and a nurse were at her bedside. Lucy lay with her bed slightly elevated and her eyes closed. We visited with the usual pleasantries. Soon, she opened her eyes and started to look at us. After about a half hour, she joined in the conversation. When our conversation was completed, we started to exit her room. She asked if we would say a prayer with her. All the while, we had been noticing a strange look on the faces of the

nurse and her husband. We held hands and uttered a prayer for health and strength for Lucy. Then, we left the room. Two days later, at our work place in the diocesan office, Donald told me that Lucy had asked to see me and wanted to know what had happened.

What I discovered upon visiting Lucy again was that when we arrive at her room on Christmas morning, the doctors had given her up and called in the family for a final visit. The rest of the family- her father, mother and two daughters were-in the cafeteria while we were visiting her. Our bishop had already given her communion and the final rites. Ten years later, Lucy was still living and Don had long since died of lung cancer. In 1973, Alice and I had unwittingly come face to face with the God of life in a miraculous way.

II. A Healing And A Resurrection Mark 5:21-43

Jesus, in St. Mark's gospel had been exhibiting signs of his face to face contact with the God of life throughout Palestine. In tonight's lesson, we find him in the gentile area called the Decapolis. A ruler of the Jews, Jairus came to him asking him to visit his near-death daughter. He wanted Jesus to come lay his hands upon her for healing.

For the time being, a large crowd follow Jesus toward Jairus' house. Then Jesus felt a power drain from his body by someone from the crowd who touched him. There was a woman in the crowd who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Just from the touch of Jesus' garment, she was made well. Jesus then asked who touched him. That woman came up to him in fear and trembling, fell down before him and confessed that she was the one. The woman knew what she was risking. She also knew that it could jeopardize Jesus' standing in the synagogue because being an unclean person herself according to Jewish law, she had make him unclean by touching him. She probably expected a reprimand from Jesus. Instead, Jesus looked at her with compassion because he truly reflected the power and healing possessed by being Face to Face with the God of Life in his own person. Jesus said, "*Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.*" Mark 5:31.

Jesus and the crowd now drew near Jairus' house. Presently, someone came from the house, informed Jairus, Jesus and the crowd that the young girl had died. They counseled Jairus to trouble the master no longer. Jesus turned to Jairus and said, "*Do not fear, only believe.*" Mark 5:36. Jesus approached the house, reprimanded the crowd for their weeping and wailing. He told them that the little girl was only sleeping and dismissed them as he, the close disciples and the father proceeded into the house. Taking the dead girl's hand, Jesus commanded her to "*arise*" in Aramaic and the girl revived and got up and walked about the house. Everybody was amazed as Jesus asked them to tell no one what had happened. Jairus, his wife, his daughter and the disciples had experienced a Face to Face encounter with the Lord of Life in a life and death situation.

III. Called To The Ministry of Healing

I have shared three incidents of the Face to Face encounter with the God of Life. Now let us look at the details. Healing and reviving belong to God alone. A human being or a sacred object may be an instrument or channel through which that restoration occurs, but it is God who does the healing. Personal faith or somebody's faith may be an important

element. Jesus said time and again that a person's faith had made them well. Nevertheless, God does not require a person's faith nor a sacred blessed object to work his miracles.

The Pauline writer wrote in I Timothy about certain gift that were within the community, *"Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you."* I Timothy 4:14. James reminded his community of the gift of healing available to the church, *"Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayers of the faithful will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up."* James 5:14-15. Healing is a central part of the ministry of the church and we are recovering it in many ways today.

The word 'health includes: The -th ending meaning that which has the quality or character of Health. It includes: an Old English *hǣl* (whole, hale). Therefore, health and holistic are both about wholeness. Health involves all aspects of physical life, when you are well as well as when you are ill. Healing may be physical, spiritual or both. My favorite story on healing

Each congregation is called to a healing ministry and needs to think about what that really means. There are holistic approaches to healing that churches may engage in and use. The church is recovering its healing ministry in one or more of these ways and I recommend them to you:

1. By prayers during worship, and prayer-oriented special worship services for healing;
2. By [intercessory prayer](#) and prayer cells, which keep the ill in prayer for as long as is needed;
3. By the laying on of hands, or anointing of the sick with oil [by elders, deacons](#) , and others who are commissioned or ordained, especially during worship while others are communing, as part of the congregational prayers, or quietly after the service;
- 4 By visitation teams that give comfort and joy to those in supervised medical settings like nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and hospices;
5. By holding the simple conviction that God does answer prayer;
6. Through the Spirit's gifts of healing, given sovereignly by the Holy Spirit as needed;
7. By one-on-one private confession and absolution, a key step towards inner healing;
8. Through support of health services, such as hospices, social services centers, clinics-alternative services, abuse shelters, and clinics for the uninsured;
9. Through encouragement of preventive health care through exercise, education in first aid, heimlich maneuver , and CPR, and sign-ups for blood and organ donation;
10. Through the promotion of good personal health practices, such as eating good foods in moderation, keeping clean, and discouragement of smoking and substance abuse;
11. Through choosing a qualified local person as the [parish nurse](#), who has the task of teaching about health, spreading word about available health services, and making basic preventive care freely available in the congregation and neighborhood;
12. By creating an atmosphere where joy, laughter, and fitting celebration are a part of

healthy normal living;

13. Through [Stephen Ministers](#) and other trained helpers;

14. By being home to support groups such as AA, [Al-Anon](#) , and Overeaters Anonymous;

15. By being home to fellowship groups for [nurses](#) , doctors, EMTs, and such; and to create drop-boxes, email boxes or message boards for them as a place where they can freely ask for prayer;

16. By supporting or setting up day care for working moms, relief care services for those who are taking care of persons with long-term illness in homes and services for the elderly.

If the church is to be a real place of healing, she must not abandon the restored ones but broadening that healing into the other aspects of their lives. As churches, we must exhibit the love and healing of Jesus Christ by loving, nurturing, caring, consoling and ministering to the whole person of all ages. If we fail in that effort, we neglect a vital and essential part of the holistic ministry of Jesus Christ.

The great commission sends us to *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I that I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, to the close of the age.”* Matthew 28:19-20. Tonight, I remind you also of Jesus’ mission statement as he came into Nazareth, *The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”* Luke 4:18-19. The church that seeks to follow in our Lord’s footsteps must always combine the Mission of Christ and his church with the Great Commission.

I challenge you to go make disciples as you carry forth healing to the nations! Amen!