

This gospel reading for today is one that often has me crying out, "Not fair!" How come this leader of the synagogue and the unnamed woman with the hemorrhage get to be healed while so many others do not? Jesus uses a line which in and of itself is great and comforting, but people have interpreted it many times over the years in ways that are hurtful. He said to the woman with the hemorrhage, "Daughter, your faith has made you well." That is great. It reminds us of the role that faith has in being in relationship with Jesus. However, it does not explain why people of faith are not always healed. People often interpret it to mean that if you have enough faith all your problems will always be fixed; that life will somehow be better for you. God will watch over you and make your life good.

This is also a statement that is used as a weapon to cause guilt. Someone told me once that she was attending a Christian elementary school when President Kennedy was shot. The principle had come into her classroom and announced to the class that the president had been shot and that they should pray for him, which they did. Later on the principle returned with the

news that the president had died from the gunshot. And he said that they must not have prayed hard enough, for if they did the president certainly would not have died.

This is total nonsense of course, but it certainly caused guilt. And it unintentionally taught that lack of faith was the cause of the problem.

Visiting with people in a crisis in a hospital is always interesting, and often frustrating. Sometimes something apparently miraculous will happen. People will credit faith and prayers. While I certainly don't want to disagree, I always have an uncomfortable feeling. What would they say if things were going badly? What about when I walk down the hall and visit a very faith-filled person who is suffering tremendously for no real reason? And then there's the whole message that God must have a purpose for it all.

What I want to say, but is almost always impossible to say in those situations, is that life isn't fair. Jesus taught any number of times that bad things happen to good people. It

doesn't mean they necessarily did anything wrong or that God is trying to punish them.

When someone is miraculously healed did faith play a role? Maybe; anything is possible with God. But we can't jump to conclusions.

Honestly I don't like Jesus' answer that bad things just sometimes happen. Oh, it's one thing to step on a tack in a parking lot because someone accidentally dropped it. That kind of pain I can overlook pretty easily. Real pain, real suffering is a different story. It doesn't go away so quickly all the time. What about the athletic and brilliant person who is crippled and mentally unstable after an accident with a drunk driver? What about that person's family who are dependent? In Luke 13 Jesus mentions the 18 people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. We aren't sure exactly what Jesus is referring to here. The tower of Siloam was probably a part of the defenses of the city of Jerusalem and some people had interpreted its collapse as divine judgment against those who were killed. This is one of the things that Jesus uses as an example that sometimes bad things just happen.

That's a fine example for teaching, but I can't help asking about the women and children whose lives suddenly became unstable and uncertain because their husbands or fathers were killed in a freak accident. What did they do? Quite possibly it was a lifetime of misery.

Pain is real. It hurts a lot and sometimes it seems to go on forever. For the leader of the synagogue that day and for that unnamed woman with the hemorrhage their pain stopped. For others it doesn't.

There is an easy answer I can give to all this. And since it's easy I'm going to give it - and then knock it down. The easy answer is to say keep having faith. Endure your suffering and God will take it away. Or, turn to your beliefs ever harder and they'll help you to make it through. It is easy to say that God is with you in your suffering and he will give you strength. Those are easy answers and they're ones that are used many times. They are also wrong.

There's a theme to our gospel reading that I think we easily miss. That is restoration to community. In the case of Jairus his daughter is restored to him, the community of their family is made whole. In the case of the unnamed woman, something different happens. We never get her name, but she is given a position. Jesus calls her "daughter". She is put into the household of God.

In both the case of this woman and Jairus' daughter Jesus crosses boundaries to get to them. Jairus' daughter was dead. To touch her body would make someone ritually unclean. What does Jesus do? We read, "Taking her by the hand [Jesus] said to her, 'Talitha cum'; which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up.'" Jesus touches her. He crosses the boundary between ritually clean and unclean in order to connect with her.

Similarly the woman with the hemorrhage was unclean. For 12 years she had not been allowed to enter the temple or offer sacrifices. Every person she touched would also become unclean and so she could not touch anyone. Her condition excluded her from community. In her case she reaches out and touches Jesus -

he does not reach out to her - but the boundary between clean and unclean is still broken.

She had much to be frightened of when she was confronted by Jesus for what she had done. As a recognized healer he could expect to be paid for his services to her. She was trying to steal them because she had no money. Secondly she had made him ritually unclean. He could make a scene, abuse her, or have her punished for her actions. He does not. Instead he welcomes her; not with her name, but her position.

Perhaps the absence of her name makes it all the more appropriate for us. If it was her name then we might think the miracle was just for her, not for us. But she is called, "daughter." And I think it's safe to say that goes for males too.

This passage is about miraculous healings and boundary crossings and faith, but it is mostly about restoration to community. This woman could now be restored to family and friends and going to worship and doing daily business.

When we are in pain or feel broken and disconnected let's not forget the real power of community that Jesus brings. This church is our brothers and sisters in Christ who are our primary connections in our faith journey through life. Maybe it isn't the same as a miraculous healing power. That would be great if it happened all the time. But our deepest human needs are the need for community. It is the need to connect; the need to understand and the need to be understood.

That healing power of Jesus has been given to us fully. It is our duty and our joy to exercise it. Let's not neglect it or overlook it, but invest in it and enjoy its many benefits. Amen