

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
The Feast Day of St. Luke (transferred)
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There was a tiny girl whose mommy was very ill and had been all her short life. Her daddy had taken her mommy to special doctors from Minnesota to upstate New York and no one could help her. The little girl prayed earnestly to God to help her mommy every day for over a year. To heal her mommy, to let her come home so they could be a family again. Her mommy came home, but she wasn't healed. The tiny girl couldn't understand why God hadn't healed her mommy. She'd done everything her Sunday school teacher had told her to do. Inside she decided that she hadn't done it right somehow and gave up praying for her mommy. Her mommy was home, so she didn't have to stay with mean people anymore. She kept her love of Christ and could feel him with her, but she never really trusted God to work in the world today.

I've often wondered the same question as that little girl, why doesn't God answer all healing prayers? Recently God gave me one answer through a lesson we were studying at an Order of St. Luke meeting. In our gospel reading from today, Christ teaches in the synagogue about healing. Just four chapters later in Luke Chapter 8. There is the familiar story of the woman with the issue of blood who reached out of the crowd to touch the hem of Christ's robe. In this story, Christ lives what he taught earlier. He makes it real. A familiar story, I'd read it many times and over the years I've idly wondered why the writer chose this story to tell. There were thousands of people who touched Jesus or his clothes and were healed during his ministry. So, why this story?

As we studied we realized in that time and place a woman had very little value of her own. She was basically property of her father or husband. At that time, if a woman was bleeding, she was to set herself apart and not have any interactions with men. So for 12 years, this woman could not participate in most of her culture as she was considered defiled. She could not attend a temple service; She could not participate in full family life as she was not supposed to sleep with her husband, cook his or her sons' food, or socialize with her husband or sons. Her only contact would be other women. Her financial resources were gone. The bible says she had spent all she had on physicians, but was not healed. This woman was desperate.

I imagine the scene, knowing she wasn't supposed to be there, her heart pounding. I imagine she already felt guilt and shame for even thinking about reaching out to touch, not just a man, but the Christ. Then, she did it, secretly, hidden within that crowd. Not intending anyone to

ever know what she had done. But our Christ is a wondrous God and he sees into our hearts. He demanded to know who had touched him. In verse 47, it says that "she fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told him why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. "Instead of harsh condemnation, Christ says, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace. "By his affirmation, he healed her entire being. She could move forward with no "sin," no lingering shame or guilt for doing something against the rules of her society. He healed all of her, her spirit, her soul, her mind, and her body. Here in this story was my answer, do you see it yet?

Maybe not, but here is an illustration of what I learned. Think of God in the form of an ER doctor treating an accident victim after a car crash. He takes care of the brain swelling and internal bleeding before worrying about broken bones. Long before anyone worries about washing off the blood or cleaning cuts. God knows our bodies are finite, they are not his first priority. He worries about our internal selves. Healing our spirits, our souls, our family relationships, our relationship with him, and each other long before our bodies.

The little girl in my first story had her mother until early adulthood and once asked her mother why God had not healed her body. The mother told the girl that she had never felt that God had not answered those prayers. The mother had wanted to be able to be at home, with her family, as her children had grown up. God had answered her prayer.

As prayer ministers it was so important that we understand when you come to us on a Sunday morning and ask us to pray for your big toe. It is not a failure when you walk away and your toe still hurts. We rarely see what God does through our prayers. You may wake up the next morning and the toe is healed. Or your toe still hurts, but God has healed a wound to your soul that has kept you from talking to your father or your daughter for years. You may find yourself picking up the phone without realizing that it is because of that healed wound and you are set free. We are not God to see what wound is most important to heal. We just trust God to take our prayers and use them for your best good.

I recently went with Ellen to attend a healing talk by Alan Ames at a Catholic church in Chambersburg. I was most impressed when he said that healing is a three-part process. He said that there is no more powerful healing agent available in the world today than when you take the symbolic body and blood of Christ into your body. The second part is healing prayers, we have openings in our liturgy for silent time for prayer for ourselves and others. The bible says, "where three or more are gathered in my name, there I am also." As you silently express your need, the Lord is present through the supporting prayers in the body of Christ to attend your need. He said that the final piece is confession of sins and absolution. We also do this

every Sunday when we pray for our neighbor and ourselves. At the end Mother Barbara speaks the absolution of sins over us. When he explained this, it felt like one of those "Duh" moments. Our service is so familiar; we forget what is built right into our liturgy. How wonderful it is that our church provides this for us every Sunday!

In addition, we open the Sacristy on the first Sunday of the month for healing prayers. A special time with God, we plan for it, we pray over it, and we are very much available and visible at that time. However, if you need prayer, don't wait. Those of us who offer healing prayers, encourage you to let someone know your need and we will pray with you. This is our ministry, this is our calling, this is who we are. We will pray with you, we will cry with you, we will wait with you in silence if that is your need. You are not imposing, you are not taking up our time, you are not in our way. One would think you are the one gaining from God through our prayers. But oddly enough, we gain more. The more we act as open vessels for God to use, the more God pours out his love onto us. Never feel that you are not important enough to bother us or a few tears would get in the way. We are here to pray for you, it is a gift to us to share God's love with you. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be there for you.