

**Sermon – 7/1/18**  
**“The Spirit Brings...Healing”**  
**Psalm 130; Mark 5:21-43**  
**5th Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Davidson College Presbyterian Church – Davidson, NC**  
**Scott Kenefake, Interim Pastor**

Does anyone here like to eat? Allow me to introduce you to *Dinner Church*. They are popping up—particularly in big cities--all over the country!

Twice a week, every Sunday and Monday night, around a dozen New Yorkers gather in long, candle-lit studio apartment nestled between a hair salon and some warehouses in one of Brooklyn’s latest hip neighborhoods. They’re actors, singers, seminarians and new parents, and they sit in groups of six around tables in one of the simplest and most untraditional Christian worship spaces the city has to offer.

*St. Lydia’s Church* has no pews, no altar, no vestments, no band or choir, and little formality of any kind. Instead, church means drums and chanting, with frequent references to Jesus; breaking bread and drinking communion grape juice; and a long, three-hour *homemade vegetarian dinner* punctuated by Bible readings, a sermon and frequent talk of what it means to be a young spiritual seeker in Brooklyn. The pastor is ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, but the members themselves range from atheist and agnostic to evangelical, Catholic and Episcopalian.

*“Growing up, I was really sure in my faith in God and in going to Episcopal church — I loved the liturgy — but my sense was that I would never invite a friend of mine to this kind of worship service because it felt like there were so many barriers everywhere, from the look to the feel to the sounds of the place,”* says Emily Scott, 34, who founded *St. Lydia’s* dinner church five years ago at a friend’s apartment (it more recently settled into its new home in Gowanus). *“We try to practice the most basic form of Christianity: bread, wine — grape juice in our case — water, a meal, singing and a community relationship and connection. I preach, but so does everyone else. We learn from each other.”*<sup>1</sup>

*“I see the hunger for an experience of intimacy and the sacred reflected in the culture at large,”* said Rev. Scott. *“Our renewed interest in the local, the artisanal, the reclaimed, seems to me to be a yearning for a life that takes place at a smaller scale. We want to know the person who made our bread in a bakery, not a sprawling, steely factory in some distant, nameless place. We want to know the smell of the earth where our vegetables came from. We want to make things from scratch. In short, we want to know ourselves and one another.”*

*And what happens around those tables, designed to encourage the people of God to see one another, face to face? I would argue (said Rev. Scott) that **justice**—and **healing**, too, begins on a micro-scale at our church. It starts small, with relationships built around the table. I believe that every time a congregation sits down with someone from whom they would otherwise be divided, justice is made. The conversation between the recently homeless man and the recent college graduate. She may have passed him on a street corner earlier today, but tonight they are talking over a bowl of stir fry. Later, they will do the dishes together. And after that they may change their corner of the world for the better. To know the other always takes place on the smallest level possible: one human sitting down with another. But in doing so, we encounter something huge: the limitless presence of God<sup>2</sup>.*

I want to highlight two words of the Rev. Emily Scott; *justice and healing*,” because they are the keys to understanding our Gospel reading from Mark this morning—healing stories about the woman with the hemorrhage and the healing of Jairus’s daughter.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Surprising Sacred Gathering Spaces That Are Moving Into Your Neighborhoods*, ”Jaweed Kaleem, *Huffington Post (Religion)* December 6, 2017

<sup>2</sup> *We’ve Seen Mega Church? But How About Micro-Church?* Rev. Emily M.D. Scott, *Huffington Post Religion*, June 6, 2014

You see, women and girls were among the lowest of Jewish society. They had no rights outside the home, and even in the home they were subject to the rule of their fathers or husbands.

Moreover, girls passed from father to husband with no say in the matter; they were sold for dowry when they became of age at about twelve years old. Women were not to be addressed or spoken to in public, were to walk six paces behind their husband, and were not allowed to divorce. The Mishnah taught that women were little more than slaves who could be acquired by intercourse, money or writ. (m. Qidd 1:1)

But Jesus' tone towards women was different. He treated them with respect. His teachings were radical for his time. Many women, as we know, were among his followers. Jesus was concerned about the plight of women and children in Jewish society.<sup>3</sup>

And note that these stories both share a common trait, *uncleanness*. Judaism considered the dead ritually *impure*. Also, women were considered impure during their menstrual cycle. Therefore, these are stories about women rendered *impure* by disease or death.

And so, as Jesus returns to Jewish territory—a crowd is following him, and Jairus, a leader of a synagogue, asks him to heal his daughter (vv. 21-23). The plea is surprising, given that most synagogues were led by Pharisees.

Jesus then walks to Jairus's house, and while pushing his way through the crowd, a woman touches his clothes and is healed immediately (vv. 23-34). Jesus recognizes that something has happened and wants to know who has touched him—which made him *impure, unclean*, as well. The woman then reveals herself and he commends her for her deep faith (v. 34).

But when Jesus finally reaches the young girl, she is dead (vv. 35-43). However, the healing of the impure woman assures us that Jesus will also “heal” the now impure dead. Overcoming fear—and even mockery, Jesus raises the girl from the dead.<sup>4</sup>

Or did he? What are these stories really about? Are we to take them literally, at face value? If we were present with modern digital cameras, would they have captured the miracles in 1080 p? Or is something else, something *more* going on here?

Bishop John Spong says that ... “the healing miracles are (best) understood to be *signs* that Jesus is the Messiah. The narratives are filled with hidden messages and code language. That is a strong argument, I believe, that these narratives should *not* be treated as literal events ..., but as *messianic signs ... interpretive narratives* far more than they are descriptions of supernatural events.<sup>5</sup>

John Dominic Crossan, takes a different angle and suggests that we can see in Jesus's healing ministry certain parallels with modern medicine. Quoting Arthur Kleinman, Crossan says:

*“A key axiom in medical anthropology is the dichotomy between two aspects of sickness: **disease and illness**. Disease refers to a malfunctioning of biological and/or psychological processes, while the term illness refers to the psychosocial experience and meaning of perceived disease.<sup>6</sup>*

In other words, a *disease* is, to put it bluntly, between me, my doctor, and a bug. Something is wrong with my body and I take it to a doctor to be fixed. But *illness* is seen on a wider level.

<sup>3</sup> Rich Procida, *What It Means to Have Faith: The Bleeding Woman and the Dying Daughter*, Modern Lectionaries, June 13, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Pablo A. Jimenez, *Preaching God's Transforming Justice*, WJK, Louisville, 2011, pp. 311, 312

<sup>5</sup> John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious*, Harper, San Francisco, 2007, p. 81

<sup>6</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, Harper, San Francisco, 1994, p. 81

Think, for example, of the difference between *curing the disease* or *healing the illness* known as AIDS. A cure for the disease is absolutely desirable—and with the use of antiretroviral drugs, treatment has been so successful that in many parts of the world, HIV has become a chronic condition in which progression to AIDS is increasingly rare.

But these medications don't treat the *illness*. Only we can heal the illness by refusing to *ostracize* those who have it, by empathizing with their anguish, and by enveloping their sufferings with both respect and love.

This, says Crossan, is the central problem of what Jesus was doing in his healing miracles. Was he curing the disease through an intervention in the physical world, or was he healing the illness through an intervention in the social world?

Crossan suggests that Jesus is healing illnesses, not diseases.

*"By healing the illness without curing the disease, Jesus acted as an alternative boundary keeper in a way subversive to the established procedures of his society. Such an interpretation may seem to destroy the miracle. But miracles are not changes in the physical world so much as changes in the **social world**, and it is society that dictates, in any case, how we see, use, and explain that physical world. It would, of course, be nice to have certain miracles available to change the physical world if we could, **but it would be much more desirable to make certain changes in the social one, which we can.** We ourselves can already make the physical world totally uninhabitable; the question is whether we can make the social world humanly habitable."*<sup>7</sup>

You know, after raising Jairus' daughter from the dead, Jesus tells them to give her something to *eat*. This not only proves that she is alive (Death must be famishing!) it is an instruction to the Jewish nation—and a powerful symbol: provide for lowly!

To feed someone is to provide nourishment. This goes beyond food. We are to nourish mind and soul as well. This means we must provide people with education and opportunity, health care and housing, community and respect, and many other things.

Mark's story also points to the divisions in Jewish society not only between male and female, but also between the weak and the strong, the clean and the impure, and the rich and the poor. Most of all, Mark is calling us to work both within the system and social conventions of our time as well as outside of them to foment change.

We do this by standing up for justice, whether by civil disobedience and protest or by voting and participating in the democratic process. The Greek words used to describe the resurrection mean *"to wake up"* and *"to stand up."* God woke Jesus up from death and stood Jesus up again. The resurrection of this twelve-year-old girl and of Jesus is God's way of telling us to get up and stand up for justice.

In addition, this healing and resurrection represent spiritual *rejuvenation*. By lifting up the lowly and providing for *"the least of these,"* we strengthen and reinvigorate our world. When we are *spiritually rejuvenated*, we find the courage to act justly and the fortitude to stand up for the rights of others. We are to take the hand of the dead and raise them up.

So, *rise up and stand up* for justice! It's time to have the *courage* to act, to *face* the demons of our world and to *lift up* its lowly just as Jesus did. This is the only way to *heal* our nation and world.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 82

<sup>8</sup> Rich Procida, *What It Means to Have Faith: The Bleeding Woman and the Dying Daughter*, Modern Lectionaries, June 13, 2015