

Semicontinuous

2 Sam. 1:1, 17–27

Ps. 130

Complementary

Lam. 3:22–33

Ps. 30

2 Cor. 8:7–15

Mark 5:21–43

Will Healing Come?

Goal for the Session

Exploring two healing stories in Mark 5, adults will identify ways to seek healing in their own lives.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 5:21–43

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Efraín Agosto

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WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Mark D. W. Edington

In the kingship of Jesus *the need of the marginalized and vulnerable is addressed before the need of the celebrated and powerful*. One imagines the reactions of the crowd, knowing in whose company Jesus is traveling. Here is a woman barred by law from hope of regaining her health, her safety, or her place in the community. But the message is clear: in the realm ordered by Jesus’ kingly authority, those on the fringes of society have a rightful place in direct relationship with the Lord. Moreover, Jesus exercises *absolute sovereignty over the realm of law*, reaching through the purity boundaries to effect a direct encounter based on the authority not of law but of faith.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Michael L. Lindvall

I have a friend, a man of deep faith, who was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. He is in the last debilitating stages of the disease. Nevertheless, he once told me that his prayers had been answered. He said in all sincerity, “I *have* been healed, not of Parkinson’s disease, but I have been healed of my fear of Parkinson’s disease.” These two biblical healing stories in which people turn to Jesus for healing will raise the question, “Does prayer work?” If we mean by this, “Do you get what you pray for?” the honest answer will be “Sometimes, but not always.” Pray as they may, congregation and pastor both know that all prayers are not answered as we pray them.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Beverly Zink-Sawyer

A question has to do with what role faith plays in our healing. The hemorrhaging woman has the audacity to transgress a whole host of social protocols when she touches Jesus’ robe without permission to claim her own healing. Talk about faith! And then there is Jairus, whose faith causes him to fall at Jesus’ feet, despite how Jesus is regarded by most synagogue leaders. These examples challenge us to examine our own faith, asking how we find the strength to claim God’s promises of healing and hope for ourselves, and how we empower others to do the same.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 5:21–43

Focus on Your Teaching

Many adults have prayed for healing, either their own or another's. Some adults have experiences where healing has come, perhaps in ways viewed as miraculous. But healing in terms of cure does not always come. Some adults may have bitter memories when prayers for a loved one or oneself did not “work.” Today's session explores two stories in which individuals sought out Jesus' healing touch at some risk. Be sensitive to adults in your group who may be struggling with matters of healing in their lives or those of loved ones. How might these stories accompany them on those journeys in ways that offer wholeness?

Be my light in preparation, that I may shed light in my leading. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for July 5, 2015

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: Resource Sheet 1
- option 3: index cards, pens

“Crossed again” reminds us Jesus had been on the eastern (Gentile) shore of the sea after his stilling of the storm. Jairus's seeking of Jesus stands in stark contrast to earlier encounters of Jesus with synagogue officials (Mark 3:1–6).

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, prepare a sheet of newsprint with the bulleted questions participants will address when preparing their report for the *Galilean Times* in Exploring.

Welcome participants as they arrive. Introduce any guests or newcomers. Invite adults to recall an experience where they stood in need of healing. Ask them to consider these questions silently:

- ✿ Whose help did you seek out, and why?
- ✿ What risk, if any, was involved in your seeking that help?

Form pairs. Affirm that no one need disclose anything that makes them uncomfortable. Encourage partners to relate something of why they sought help from the one(s) they did, and name any risk that was involved. Briefly discuss connections between their stories.

Note that today's session will delve into a pair of intertwined healing stories inherent with risk in Mark. Offer this or a similar prayer:

Gracious God, we seek your presence in this time: to guide us in your way, so as to set us on your way. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

EXPLORING

Set the context for today's focus scripture by reviewing the information in the sidebar. You might add that the narrative sandwiched between the last session's stilling of the sea (Mark 4:35–41) and today's focus scripture is an exorcism that takes place in Gentile territory.

Say that today's text will be read in three portions. Ask for three volunteers to read aloud one each of these verse segments of Mark 5: verses 21–24; verses 25–34; and verses 35–43. Explain that after each segment is read, there will be time for discussion.

Read Mark 5:21–24. If not already raised, discuss:

- ✧ What motivates this request for healing?
- ✧ What does this seeking of healing risk: for Jairus, for Jesus?

Read Mark 5:25–34. If not already raised, discuss:

- ✧ What motivates this request for healing?
- ✧ What does this seeking of healing risk: for the woman, for Jesus?
- ✧ If you were Jairus, what would you be thinking as this episode unfolds: about this woman, about Jesus?

Read Mark 5:35–43. If not already raised, discuss:

- ✧ What risks connected to healing mark the beginning of these verses: for Jairus, for Jesus?
- ✧ What risks might be seen to remain after this healing?

Form two groups and post a sheet of newsprint titled *Galilean Times*, with the bulleted questions found below. Assign one group to the unnamed woman who sought out Jesus for healing. Assign the other group to Jairus. Ask the first group to read Mark 5:24b–34 through the experience of this woman. Ask the second group to read Mark 5:21–24 and 35–43 through the experience of Jairus. Have each group prepare a statement to be published in the *Galilean Times* about their character's experience, dealing with such issues as:

- ✧ What was life like before this encounter with Jesus?
- ✧ What risks did they take in seeking out Jesus for healing?
- ✧ How was their faith shown as the encounter unfolded?
- ✧ How has life changed for them?

Gather the groups, and have each read their statement.

Return to the same two groups and character assignments. Have each group prepare a statement again—only now, base the statement on if the outcomes had not brought the cure they sought: if the woman's condition had not changed, and if the daughter had died. Ask: In those circumstances, what healing might they still have experienced? Gather the groups, and have each read their statement. Discuss the idea of healing apart from cure. Be sensitive in this conversation to adults who may be living through the differences between healing and cure.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Mark 5:21–43) and read the “So What?” excerpt aloud. Discuss the story told there in tandem with the previous exercise. Affirm that while in Mark 5 healings do come in the form of cure and restoration of life, that is not always the case. Invite adults to reflect on the following question as you move into Responding:

- ✧ How should we pray with faith, knowing our prayer may not be answered as we wish?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session.

1. **When Healing Is Not Cure** One of the chief risks to be faced when seeking healing for oneself or another is that healing may not come in the way we hoped or provide a cure.

**EASY
PREP**

Be aware that some adults may bring presumptions about “faith healing” that are quite negative—and perhaps rightly so. Some may have had harmful experiences as well.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (When Healing Is Not Cure), and have participants read it silently and consider the reflection questions on the sheet. Lead a group discussion about their thoughts in response to the reading and the reflection questions provided. Encourage adults to use this sheet through the week to guide not only their prayers but the practices by which they seek healing for themselves and others.

- 2. Faith and Healing** Mark’s pair of stories strongly underscore the role of faith in the lives of those who seek out Jesus for healing. Read the “Now What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Discuss the following:

- ✧ How do the examples of faith demonstrated by the unnamed woman and Jairus shed light on the ways we seek healing for ourselves and others, especially when there are risks in doing so?
- ✧ When you ask for healing, are you more like the woman or Jairus?

Have participants think about a current need for healing either in their own life or someone close to them. Challenge them to think of a few concrete things they will do this week to attend to this need and seek healing. Allow a few participants to tell what they plan to do.

- 3. Practicing Intercession** The unnamed woman and Jairus did not theologize, or speak abstractly, about what it means to seek healing: they practiced intercession. That is, they asked for just what they needed. Distribute index cards and pens. On one side of the card, have participants write down a need for healing they have. On the other side, have participants write down the name of another person who stands in need of healing. Commission adults to use these cards in a daily practice of intercession through prayer.

CLOSING

Gather the participants in a circle. Have participants imagine they are joined in the circle by the unnamed woman and Jairus. Invite adults to reflect on the following questions:

- ✧ What might this woman say to me about what it means to seek healing, and how to shoulder the risks of doing so?
- ✧ What might Jairus say to me about what it means to seek healing and how to shoulder the risks of doing so?

Join hands and invite adults to say something they will carry with them from this session. Then close with this or a similar commissioning prayer:

Go now in the grace God gives, in the healing Christ offers, in the steady presence of the Spirit, that we may seek healing in our lives, in the lives of others, and in this good creation. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for July 5, 2015, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on Mark 5:21–43

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She too, like the synagogue ruler, falls at Jesus’ feet in homage and seeks his mercy for her touch that should make *him* ritually impure (see Lev. 15:19–33). Jesus has already shown he is less concerned about touching the impure than about showing them mercy (see 1:41). Thus he calls this unnamed woman “daughter” and says, “Your faith has saved you” (v. 34a). Moreover, he sends her away in peace, because her faith has made her “healthy” from her illness (v. 34b). Thus Jesus provides a very public acknowledgment of a private healing.

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When Healing Is Not Cure

Read the following paragraphs written in response to Mark 5:21–43, and then reflect on the questions that follow:



Another important question raised by this text is, what does it mean to be healed? The hemorrhaging woman is healed when she reaches out and touches Jesus' robe, and the dead child is restored to life when Jesus takes her by the hand. Both stories have happy endings. But that is not always the reality of life . . . We must make it clear that not even our most earnest pleas *always* result in the answers we desire. Certainly we proclaim Jesus as Ruler over all things, the One whom "even the wind and the sea obey" (Mark 4:41), as declared in last week's Gospel text—a reality that most people of faith believe operative even in our skeptical, scientific age.

More troubling . . . is not the question of whether or not such miracles did or still may occur, but the question of how we hold onto faith *when they do not occur*. Every person of faith who suffers, such as the hemorrhaging woman and the desperate parents of the dying little girl, prays for—and usually believes in—the possibility of miraculous healing, but dramatic physical healing is rarely the response to those prayers. Here, then, is an opportunity to explore healing in its less obvious, less dramatic dimensions: healing as peace and acceptance in the face of disappointment, and as awareness of the continuing presence of God in our times of despair.¹

-  When has healing for you or a loved one been something other than a cure?
-  What are some of the practices by which you seek healing for yourself and for others, especially when a cure is not forthcoming?
-  How might faith and community support you in those practices?

1. From Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 191, 193.