

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time
II SAMUEL 1:1, 17-27
PSALM 130
II CORINTHIANS 8:7-15
MARK 5:21-43
June 30, 2024

Cured! Healed! Whole!

Twelve years! Twelve long years! Twelve years is the time it takes, after the distillation process is completed, for one of The Macallan's carefully crafted single malt scotch whisky to be smoothly aged to perfection in their meticulously oak barrels, each cask finished with an aromatic sherry seasoning. Yes, twelve years in the making! Cheers! Twelve years is the time it typically takes to get from kindergarten through a senior year of high school, these pivotal years overflowing with all the exciting and frightening experiences puberty and adolescence have to offer. Twelve years was the amount of time an unnamed woman experienced the pangs of her worst biological nightmare, suffering a debilitating and unending affliction, a steady flow of blood that remained a steady and unwelcome companion, continually rendering her perpetually unclean, unable to be touched or to reach out and touch, prohibiting her from living life to its fullest, enduring a mere hollow existence, until. Twelve years was the age of Jairus' daughter according to Luke, this story also found in the Gospel of Matthew, Mark describing her as both a child and a young woman. For further context, she was probably about the same age as Mary, the mother of Jesus. She had been deathly ill until she succumbed to the unnamed illness that seized control over her frail body, her death briefly grieved but providing an opportunity to reveal a very different, a satisfying and surprising, ending, amazing one and all. Twelve years is a long time! Twelve years is such a short time, a blip on life's radar, a mere nanosecond when measured by the vast expanse of eternity. Twelve years is but a moment in time during the span of a long lifetime, yes, when compared with the days of our lives, but twelve years can seem so long, so protracted, so tediously endless, when misery consumes the day-to-day life of the misfortunate, any unlucky victim ransacked with the

trials and tribulations of being forced to constantly navigate, to fight, a crippling, tormenting disease, to have to manage any personal or collective trauma, a horrific lot in life, testing the mettle of even the toughest among us. Yes, twelve years is always a matter of perspective based on our unique experiences, our reality, the circumstances and situations, good and bad, horrible and wonderful, that define our journey within the given time frame of a lifetime, within the living of these days. Twelve years!

As we continue our textual journey through the Gospel of Mark, we find ourselves in the midst of numerous miracle stories, each one of them designed to show that there was something extraordinary about Jesus, something special indeed! In our lections for today we read a text that intertwines two stories that transparently portray the essence of Jesus' care and compassion, revealing fully his empathetic and sympathetic demeanor, his thoughtful being always guiding his actions, always clearly and boldly on display, delightfully and blatantly in your face for all to see. So it has been for more than two thousand years! In these healing and raising initiatives, we read stories that reveal the deepest motives always intrinsic to the person of Jesus. Always doing good, the complete selflessness and loving grace of the somewhat accidental rabbi exuding from every pore of his being as he gave every ounce of himself to those he met, giving them his rapt attention as if they were the only person in his orbit, the only person on the planet. Every graciously loving response reflected the essence of Jesus' life and ministry, every precious gift he offered pouring down on all flesh like fresh rain, his preaching and teaching a profound witness, a testimony, to the presence of God fully on display, manifest completely and like none other in his life, his mercifully peaceful demeanor naturally flowing from his being as if these wonderfully endearing traits were inherently part and parcel of his DNA, permeating every fiber of his being. Jesus was the consummate lover of humanity, the very exemplary embodiment of abundant living. Debates comparing the literal or metaphorical nature of these miracle texts are rendered moot, irrelevant, nonsensical, against the backdrop of the ultimate goal these Gospel writers sought to convey as these storytellers wove their tales, reflecting on events once reported and often repeated. **These extravagantly embellished, no doubt exaggerated, stories, as fanciful as they may have been, the result of the beautifully creative residual of myth and legend, these writings were all orally shared and eventually**

preserved as a means of describing the unique character, the indescribable nature of the man from Nazareth in Galilee. Nothing more! Nothing less! The world of Jesus' day was a hot mess, the world then, and, yes, the world now, broken, fractured, shattered in so many splintered pieces that solutions seem impossible, far out of reach, the breaches far beyond any repair, the remotest chance of healing, not even the slightest chance of mending, achieving any semblance of wholeness.

For so many people, life is lived outside the expansive possibility of hope, seemingly always bound within the constraining, suffocating, confines of hopelessness, the diminishing limitations that offer no escape from the bonds of whatever holds them back and keeps them from being whole, from becoming all they were created to be, forcing them to navigate an inescapable gerbil wheel. Their plight is reminiscent of what was once called in medieval times the wheel of life, revealing the random, happenstance nature of the human lot, oft revealing a deplorable existence endured during a life filled with poverty in all its evil, demonic, forms. Famine, war, hunger and thirst, homelessness, lacking in the basics, authoritarian domination, crises of every human invention and natural occurrence, afflicts peoples far and wide from all around the globe, yes, including the land of the free and the brave, this bastion of liberty and presumed justice for all. The world, as we know full well, can be cruel, unkind, and is filled to overflowing with the dispossessed, those who live on the fringes, the marginalized of society. The needs are staggering, overwhelming! Some of those who suffer life's inadequacies and inequalities, inconsistent discrepancies abounding, even live among us in this prosperous tourist haven called the Northwoods. For many individuals and groups throughout the world every day is a challenge, a daily grind, part of their metaphorical twelve-year cycle, drudgery without limits and without end. **For a lot of folks, every day is a chore, more of the same, an exercise in futility, an endless chain of the hauntingly familiar that is their overwhelmingly perpetual routine, their horrific version of ordinary time. Jesus saw it, experienced it, and did his best to do something about it, to address it, seeking desperately to make a huge difference in the lives of those he encountered and engaged. In the Gospels we read some of these wondrous episodes. These are their stories!**

A deeply profound and significant concept in Judaism is known as “tikkum olam” and is generally translated as “repair of the world,” “improving the world,” or perhaps recreating the world, “bringing creation closer to the harmonious state for which it was created.” This signature theme within the Jewish tradition is steeped in the idea that this chosen, special, people are not only responsible for the moral, spiritual, and material welfare of themselves, but are to bring to fruition a just society. Known as “tzedakah,” in Hebrew this term is translated as social justice, charity, as one rabbi has stated, establishing “Godly qualities throughout the world.” As one writer opines, the repair of the breach is two-fold, “the gathering of light and of souls, to be achieved by human beings through the contemplative performance of religious acts.” The idea of peace, “shalom”, is achieved when the goals of repairing the world and all those who dwell therein, as the Psalmist poetically writes, is realized and wholeness becomes the order of the day. I bring these Hebraic images to light because when I read the healing and/or raising stories of Jesus, the rabbi and peasant reformer once and always a loyally practicing Jew, when I read of his encounters with peoples from all walks of life as he engaged them “no matter who they were or where they were on life’s journey,” I see “tzedakah”, social justice, charity, at work, I see “tikkum olam”, repair, at work, I see peace, “shalom” in operation, fulfilled in those moments that surely seemed as if they were frozen in time, a mysteriously suspended animation in whatever constitutes that bizarre state of awareness. In every act, in every encounter, in every word, Jesus was not just addressing that specific person in that specific moment, not simply meeting an immediate and temporal need, but Jesus was making an impact on society, having an affect on the world, repairing the breach continually broken since the dawn of creation, making a difference one person at a time, doing something of merit that would last, yes, that would have eternal value. Jesus not only sought to cure, to heal, to raise, but to make whole, to restore what was lacking, what was painfully missing. When one suffers, we all suffer. When justice is absent from one, it is absent from all. When one is persecuted, we are all diminished. When one is lost, all are lost. One of the subtleties in our intertwined Gospel lection from Mark today is that we find a leader of the synagogue, a VIP, very important person indeed, who was in need. We find an unnamed woman, no background on the textual radar, who was in need. Jesus met both of them where they were, a reminder that he was no respecter of persons while respecting everyone! As Paul discusses

in II Corinthians today, the standard being equality, “. . . the one who gathered more did not have too much, and the one who gathered less did not have too little!”

In what was truly a serendipitous conversation with my New Testament scholar friend, R. Alan Culpepper, this past week, he told me about an article he had just written called “Mending the Saints for Ministry”?, a commentary on Ephesians 4:12 which discusses the equipping, or as Culpepper prefers, “mending” the saints for building up the body of Christ. The Greek term “katartison”, which means “mending”, is the same verb used when describing the call of disciples James and John who were “mending” their nets. The term is also used in describing setting bones as a surgical procedure, to mend them in place, healing and restoring them to full and proper function. Yes, we talk a lot about someone who sustained an injury being “on the mend!” Yes, this key word has varied meanings and thus has broad interpretations and implications. The idea of mending provides a beautiful metaphorical image implying not only addressing or fixing, curing or healing, but making whatever is being mended whole. While Mark does not employ this term in our lection for today, I believe that what Jesus was up to was not merely curing or healing the obvious insult and injury that afflicted the one in dire need, but was to do something far deeper, far more complete, far more comprehensive. Jesus went about the business of mending hearts and minds, to employ an overused Shakespearean image, seeking to assuage the “slings and arrows” that damage the human creature emotionally, mentally, physically, spiritually. His was a holistic approach! Culpepper cites the early Church Father Irenaeus whose understanding of “katartison” was that it conveyed a sense of “completion or perfection.” It is my contention that Jesus sought to bring wholeness to every individual with whom he related, mending them to the core of their being, making them whole in a way, or ways, they had never experienced or ever imagined. In his life and living Jesus served as a paradigm, modeling for us what mending the world could, would, and should look like! In so doing, Jesus sought to make the world a better place, one person, one needy, one distressed, one lonely, one outcast, one ostracized, one sick, one dead, person at a time. We cannot save the world. It is too big and too much, but we can compartmentalize. We can make a difference each and every day with each and every person with whom we have contact, impacting their lives in ways

that we and/or they could never anticipate. I am reminded of the syrupy story about the man who was tossing beached starfish back into the sea. A bystander critiqued his generous act by reminding him that he could not save them all, that he could not make a real difference. His response as he tossed another starfish back into the drink was, “Made a difference to that one!” That is the least and the most we can do, are required to do!

We talk a lot about mending fences, a euphemism for repairing relationships, yes, the same idea conveyed in mending nets and mending saints. That is our missional goal as a congregation, that with everything we do and everything we support, with all our resources, human and financial, that we make a difference in the life of at least one person, hopefully many. Our objective is that we mend, that we strive not only to cure or heal, but that at least on the rarest of occasions, we help make people whole, individuals and even groups. In the immortal words attributed to John Wesley of Methodist fame, though he may have never said it, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.” May that mantra be so for us! After all, we do because we can!

In the name of the One who creates, redeems, and sustains, and longs to make us and the world whole! Tikkum olam! Amen and amen!

Information about “tikkum olam” and “tzedakah” came from internet sources.