

Two healing stories – I am always drawn to the healing stories.

I believe they happened.

I don't think we would have ever heard of Jesus had he not been a healer - as well as a teacher.

As I read them over and over this week -

I thought of the many ways healing is always so close to us – important to all our lives – all the time.

As I pondered the stories I heard two themes – faith and compassion.

Faith and compassion are two spiritual principles at the heart of all religion – not just ours.

So – let's look at these stories.

I want you to know the stories because there is much to them.

They speak to us in different and surprising ways.

I am always interested to hear how they may speak to any of you.

I welcome the conversation.

Mark relates a series of miracle stories – as the writers refer to them.

Along the way as these things happen – Jesus encounters the antagonism
of the scribes and Pharisees.

And he encounters the disciples' lack of faith or understanding of what is going on.

Jesus has said to them, "Do you still not perceive or understand?

Are your hearts hardened?

Do you have eyes and fail to see?

Do you have ears and fail to hear?

Jesus comes to impart physical healing.

His greater purpose is to open spiritual eyes and ears and hearts.



I guess it says that there has been controversy about health care at least since back then.

It is still a spiritual problem – a problem of opening spiritual eyes and ears and hearts.

For when we criticize universal care here in our country –

we are usually thinking about something we might lose –

if we collectively create care that extends to everyone.

We seem to be guided by fear - and I expect these people were too.

But – let's take a look at the stories -
and then I want to talk a little about compassion and faith.

Jesus goes to the region of Tyre – and he enters a house.
He says that he did not want anyone to know he was there.

We don't know why. He may have wanted a break –
or he may have wanted to avoid more criticism from the scribes and Pharisees.

The important thing is that this is Gentile territory.
Tyre and Sidon was the home of Jezebel – Elijah's enemy.
The place inspired the ire of prophets like Ezekial.
So – the area itself probably represented the most extreme expression of paganism -
that a Jew could expect to encounter.

Jesus expanding the scope of his ministry
beyond anything conceivable by most people.

This takes him out of
the geography, ethnicity, gender and religion of his culture
in a way that was unprecedented in his world.



A woman who had heard of him comes to him.
She asks him to cast the demon out of her little girl.
He says something strange – or so it seems at first.
No scholar seems to have a grasp on what it means.
Maybe the word "children" refers to the children of Israel – the Jews.
And perhaps he meant it in a derogatory manner.
But, I also think about how Jesus often speaks to the heart –
like he did when he met the Samaritan woman at the well -
and there may be a line missing.

It might be that Jesus has to be convinced – he has this opportunity to live into
what he had said some time earlier about what is clean and unclean.
It may be a learning time for him to live into what he has been teaching.

If Jesus was not being compassionate at the beginning of the conversation - it kicked in before long.

His compassion could be related to her faith.

That would be pretty human – for those who find themselves viewing Jesus as a human being -
on that continuum of human and divine.

But - as a mother - what comes to my mind is that this is a house with children and pets.

The text does not indicate this house belonged to the woman
because she goes back to her home
to find that the demon has left the child.

So she may be visiting a friend or relative who is taking care of several children.

Even when we have a sick child – we still have other children who need care.

We still need to give them dinner – and we need to feed the dog.

Makes sense to me.

I guess that would be a feminist reading of it.

And the early commentators were men for whom this scene was not quite common.

I think about watching this as a video - and Jesus is helping the woman feed the children
and even giving a few scraps to the pets that are scurrying around the table.

A puppy is liking Jesus in the face as he gives him a treat – and Jesus says:

And by the way – your daughter is fine.

It was a simple and profound faith that the mother had – it seems.

And – it seems that it was an easy healing for Jesus.



So how do faith and compassion weave in and out of it?

The woman would not have come to Jesus had she not believed that he could help.

And – he had to care enough – have compassion to take the time and interest to do it.

I have talked about Dan Millman's book about the laws of spirit.

He says that compassion is the recognition that we are each doing the best we can within the limits
of our current beliefs and capacities.

Perhaps Jesus' compassion even included helping with the children and pets
in addition to attention to the sick child.



I think we have lost a lot of our capacities in the healing arts.
That may have to do with the commercialization of healing and health care.
It may have to do with self-interest and vested interests – certainly it is now.
I believe our compassion has sold out to self-interest and vested interests.
And I think both Christianity and Judaism (I don't know enough to include any other religion)
has given much of their capacities away.
Because - something has happened to compassion – in health care.

Dan Millman has the wise woman called the sage
teach compassion by calling the traveler's attention (our attention) to the Earth.
The wise woman - says to the traveler – as she looks up into the sky:
The earth has a way of being compassionate with us.
"I've spoken to the earth. I know her heart,
and I say to you that she understands in a way so deep and profound
that tears would come to your eyes
if you could but touch the edges of her compassion.
The earth forgives us because she knows that we are flesh of her flesh –
a part of her that is still learning and growing.
The law of compassion directs you to act out of love and understanding
rather than out of hatred or ignorance.
To do so requires a leap to a larger perspective.



Maybe Jesus did this when he left most everything that was familiar
and came to this place – with the woman and the children and the pets.
Sometimes it takes some distance to get perspective.

It is a little like the astronauts who first soared into space.
They left Earth as scientists and pilots – and came back mystics.

In looking back at a single, glorious, sacred, blue-green, living, breathing planet -
they were brought into a sense of awe and humility.

The sage tells the traveler, "The time has come for you to see yourself in a new way."



And then faith, Millman says that faith is our direct link to universal wisdom.

We are more than we have heard or read or studied.

There is a spirit working through us all.

We Christians say that Christ is working in our life.

The law of faith is about trusting that there is something
working through you and everything.

Even so – it is one of the greatest stretches – one of the greatest leaps – a human being can take.

The law of faith does not require you to believe it.

But it guides you to live your life as if this were true – in other words – on faith.

Faith is the divine order that pervades all things.

We see it with the mother who came to Jesus.

Then Jesus returned Tyre and went towards the Sea of Galilee – in the region of the Decapolis.

Again – he stays in the gentile areas.

These cities were a loose confederation of cities
to provide for the common defense –

and that defense was sometimes against Jewish incursions – but also desert marauders.

There were some Jews living there but not a lot of them.

So here he is – and they bring to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech -
and begged him to lay his hands on him.

"Laying on of hands" was a Jewish healing practice.

So - whoever brought the man to Jesus – may have been Jewish.

It just reflects the diversity of the area.

But there is no mention of faith on the part of the man.

But we might see a parallel between the deaf man and the disciples.

The man can neither hear nor speak properly.

The disciples cannot understand what Jesus is telling them -
and so they too have some impairment.

They too, need Jesus' touch to that they might see, hear, and understand.

Surely the fact that Jesus is in the Decapolis demonstrates his commitment to all persons
and calls others to share that commitment.

It comes so easy to want to be with others who seem the same.

If it is not racial, or gender, or national origin, its denominational or socio-economic.

We can be deaf and blind to things that don't fit our particular situation.

Jesus is always trying to draw us out of our "like me-ness."

So here Jesus takes the man aside and puts his fingers in his ears.

He also spits on his finger and touched the man's tongue..

Jesus prays, "Be opened."

The image is of the man and because of his deafness he had difficulty speaking.

Now his tongue has freedom of movement and expression.

The people are astounded and the writer says:

"He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

This calls the reader back to Isaiah 35 which we know from The Messiah:

"Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened - and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Again – we see demonstrated compassion on the part of Jesus
and faith on the part of someone.

This time it was the friends of the deaf man.

So – why do we read these stories?

They call us to value diversity – they call us to get out of our comfort zones.

They remind us that healing and health were of vital interest to Jesus.

And they remind us that faith will take us places we would not go without it.

And that compassion is the way to live.

Compassion and Faith – based on Mark 7:24-37
Aspen Community UMC
September 6, 2009

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