

Lessons in Luke: Healing Within a Healing

Luke 8:40-56

Jody Slaughter

When I was 10 years old, I almost died. I was in a coma from having Reye's Syndrome, which is linked to giving kids aspirin during a virus like the flu or chicken pox. In March of 1976, I had the flu and continued to worsen. I was given aspirin to relieve the symptoms. My parents knew something was terribly wrong, and continued to call the doctor that week. But as I complained of intense head pain, both being combative and lethargic, my doctor was called and upon hearing me in the background, he said, "Is that Jody?" My mom said, "Yes," and he said, "I'll be right there. He came to our house, ushered us to Vanderbilt Hospital, demanding people on the elevator to get out of the way as he realized the urgency of the situation.

Once I was evaluated, it was confirmed that I had Reye's Syndrome. The doctors told my parents that they would know in 3 days whether I would live or die. Since my pastor and his wife were there at that moment, they heard the urgency and desperation of the situation and they called for the deacons of our church to come to the hospital for the next three days and nights to pray for me.

For the last 40+ years I have heard of people's prayer experiences from those 3 days. And one of those is especially etched in my mind.

My parents stood by my ICU bed late the 3rd evening with Dr. Dewey Dunn, who was also a friend from our church. My dad was so distraught that he left the ICU and went past all the people who were there for our family and found the chapel there at Vanderbilt Hospital. He knelt and prayed.

(video of her dad retelling this from the Vanderbilt chapel)

"Dear God, please heal my daughter, I give her to you. We want to keep her, but she is yours." As he opened his eyes he saw the stained glass window in the chapel of Jesus welcoming the children and read the words inscribed, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," and he believed I was with Jesus, no longer alive on this earth. Yet, a peace he couldn't fully describe overwhelmed him. He left the chapel and made his way

back to the ICU. Dr. Dunn, a friend of ours, had stayed in the room and had seen my parents' anguish and stayed there praying as well. While there with me he had just witnessed the first time I had moved in three days while my dad was praying in the chapel. He found my dad as he walked back into the ICU and said, "Jody just moved her arm." In the moments, days, and weeks following, we had been healed. I say "we" because there was not only healing for me, but those who prayed for me also experienced healing within themselves.

My dad had gone to God on my behalf because I was not able...as well as many others in our family, church and community had prayed for my healing. I can't tell you the number of stories I have heard through the years of how others also experienced healing from God for themselves while asking for healing for me. There was actually healing within a healing.

When I was asked to preach this text many months ago, for this series of Lessons in Luke I read the following story and said, well, I can't say no, because I relate to this biblical story about as close to any other.

We are in the midst of a sermon series from the Gospel of Luke. Today we will learn from Luke 8:40-56. Prior to this passage, we see that Jesus had healed a man possessed of demons in the country of the Gerasenes. This area was primarily inhabited by Gentiles, and the man he healed had nothing to do with the God of Israel. Jesus healed him without regard for his beliefs or culture. After this healing, the people were afraid of this type of demonstration of healing power and asked him to leave. So, Jesus goes to the other side of the lake and this is where our reading begins today.

⁴⁰ On the other side of the lake the crowds welcomed Jesus, because they had been waiting for Him. ⁴¹ Then a man named Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with Him to come home with him. ⁴² His only daughter, who was about twelve years old, was dying.

As Jesus went with him, He was surrounded by the crowds. ⁴³ A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure. ⁴⁴ Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of His robe. Immediately, the bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. Everyone denied it, and Peter said, "Master, this whole crowd is pressing up against You."

⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt healing power go out from me." ⁴⁷ When the woman realized that she could not stay hidden, she began to

tremble and fell to her knees in front of Him. The whole crowd heard her explain why she had touched Him and that she had been immediately healed. ⁴⁸ *“Daughter,” He said to her, “your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”*

⁴⁹ *While He was still speaking to her, a messenger arrived from the home of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. He told him, “Your daughter is dead. There’s no use troubling the Teacher now.”* ⁵⁰ *But when Jesus heard what had happened, He said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid. Just have faith, and she will be healed.”*

⁵¹ *When they arrived at the house, Jesus wouldn’t let anyone go in with Him except Peter, John, James, and the little girl’s father and mother.* ⁵² *The house was filled with people weeping and wailing, but He said, “Stop the weeping! She isn’t dead; she’s only asleep.”*

⁵³ *But the crowd laughed at Him because they all knew she had died.* ⁵⁴ *Then Jesus took her by the hand and said in a loud voice, “My child, get up!”* ⁵⁵ *And at that moment her life returned, and she immediately stood up! Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat.* ⁵⁶ *Her parents were overwhelmed, but Jesus insisted that they not tell anyone what had happened.*

As I look at the context of the lesson in Luke 8, I keep seeing this reality – no matter our privilege or our shame, every person matters. No one is more important than another.

I have had the privilege of being taught about Jesus and have learned that Jesus is who I can trust to seek for healing. This little girl was not physically able to come to Jesus, so her father sought Jesus on her behalf – a father filled with grief for his little girl who was at the point of death. A loving father who ran to Jesus and fell at His feet and begged Him to come to his house to heal his daughter...just like my own father did for me.

Jesus was walking through the crowd and the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years came to find Jesus. So she, even though sick and had used all her resources to be cured, had to come to Jesus. Not wanting to be noticed, embarrassed, shamed even more than she already felt, she believed if she could just touch His robe, she would be healed. So, she made her way to Him to just touch the hem of His garment. Jesus felt the healing energy leave Him and stopped, asked twice who touched Him, and she fell at his feet confessing her need for healing and that she had immediately been healed. Jesus called her, “Daughter!” Jesus said her faith had healed her, and to go in peace.

Now, we see two daughters in need of Jesus’ healing, and faith changes their situation. One had the faith of her father and another had faith because it was all she had

left. Jesus cared for both, no matter their faith or their status.

Whether we have, or do not have, we all face our own mortality. Some people have come on our behalf to seek healing for us; some are left coming on their own, without support, to seek healing. Jesus cares about all people, no matter our status, gender, orientation, culture, color of our skin, or the amount of money we have.

My experience of healing as a little girl was formative for me and my understanding of prayer. I have been inspired to pray even more for the healing of others since that young age.

But, as we all know, healing doesn’t and hasn’t always come in the way we always want or imagine. Sometimes it takes years. Sometimes we may never see it, and sometimes we never know. But I can tell you this, I absolutely know that when we pray something changes... because we are seeking the intervention of God. We are expressing compassion for another and when we do that the very atmosphere changes in this world. We may or may not see it or know the result, but something beyond us is happening. Here’s how I know:

I prayed fervently for my mom to be healed 15 years ago from the autoimmune disease called Scleroderma. But, she only worsened, and her life ended far too early when I was 40, and she was 65. But before she died, she went from a sense of despair to a sense of hope and joy, ready for eternal life after death. She was still very sad that she would not see her precious grandkids grow up and experience life with all her family and friends, but she accepted her reality with a deep sense of peace that passes all understanding. That is how prayer brought her healing. Healing came differently for my mom than I wanted. And over the years, healing came also for me in the midst of that great loss. Certainly, it took time and people going to Jesus on my behalf, and me seeking Jesus much in the way the once bleeding woman did, at times with shame and staying hidden, but healing came.

And in these times, we can hear what Jesus tells us all, “Do not fear, only believe and your faith will make you well; daughter (or son), go in peace.”

Every person has value, and every sadness needs lament. My therapist told me one time when I was in tears talking about the loss of my mom, and I did what many of us do when we cry in front of someone, we apologize. She said, “No need to apologize...let your tears remind you that you matter.”

We need to lament and grieve our losses because it reminds us those things matter to us and that we matter,

and as this scripture reminds us, we all matter to Jesus. Jesus shows us in this story that every person deserves being seen and listened to and honored and healed in some way or another.

So, in this very moment, I'd invite you to take a deep breath, close your eyes and contemplate these questions in light of these stories for the Gospel of Luke:

How are you aware that you need healing today?
(share that with God)

Is there someone you know that for whatever reason is not able to seek Jesus? Can you go on their behalf? Can you pray and trust that God will intervene?

Or maybe you are listening now and you feel you've done all the "right" things. Ask yourself if you're expecting Jesus to heal you or someone in a particular way?
(release that expectation to God)

What prayers can you bring to this community of faith?

How can you join with others more so for prayer?

I would like to ask you to simply extend your hand now, as if reaching out to Jesus, as I close in prayer, praying an adaptation of a prayer from Black Liturgies, based on this scripture.

"God of the once bleeding woman,

Thank You for wanting more for us than a life in hiding, or a life without healing. On Your way to heal one's daughter, You stopped to listen to the story of another's hidden suffering, so that she would know her healing was worthy to be witnessed.

God, help us to come to You for our own healing; for those we are aware who are suffering; and for those in our communities who have become accustomed to going unnoticed. Keep us from becoming so preoccupied with the demands of the powerful that we let quiet stories go untold.

And, Lord, let those expecting to be centered in Your presence have their expectations dismantled, so that we learn that just because You stop to bear witness to the tragedies of others, it doesn't mean You desire healing for anyone else any less.

And for those who bleed, who have sat in the corners of pain too long, please heal. Wait for all voices, whenever we are ready to share them. And hold our stories in the story of You."

And now I invite you to lower your arms, and place your palms up in your lap, and join me as we have inhale and exhale breath prayers.

Inhale: My voice and my tears matter.

Exhale: God, help me to tell my story, to express my pain.

Inhale: I will not be made invisible.

Exhale: My presence is a healing.

Inhale: I don't understand the mysteries of life and death.

Exhale: God, You desire all people to know Your healing and love.

Inhale: Do not fear.

Exhale: Daughters and sons, your faith has made you whole. Amen.