

Thirteenth Sunday Cycle B

July 1, 2018

“God... does not delight in the death of the living” [Wisdom 1, 13].
What God delights in is creating life. God also delights in restoring life to a broken and suffering world.

We see this illustrated in today’s Gospel. Jesus is surrounded by a huge crowd of people. Two people in the crowd stand out. One is Jairus, an official of the local synagogue. Jairus has a young daughter who is very close to death. Jairus is a very desperate man, just like anyone of us would be who has a child who is deathly ill. No sooner than Jesus agrees to go with him to his home their journey is suddenly interrupted by a woman who comes up from behind him and touches his garment. She too is very desperate. She has been suffering for twelve years from hemorrhages. The many fruitless strategies at the hands of various physicians has reduced her to poverty and being worse off. Because of her bleeding anyone who came in contact with her would have been regarded as ritually unclean. By Law she would have been required to stay away.

But she dares to come close to Jesus. She believed that all she needed to do was to merely touch the clothes of Jesus and she would be healed. She wouldn’t need to touch Jesus, just his clothes. Jesus wouldn’t even have to know what she was up to. She could just touch his garment and slide back into the anonymity of the crowd and no one would be the wiser. But that is not what happened. Jesus knew right away that power had gone out from him. Jesus stood there searching for who had touched him. This woman who had been instantly healed by Jesus and restored to fullness of health now felt compelled to come forward and tell him the whole truth.

While she is telling her story, a group of people from the home of Jairus come to report that his daughter is dead. This news, of course, is

devastating, but Jesus encourages Jairus to have faith. As they approach the home of Jairus, people are weeping and wailing without restraint. Faced with this great commotion, Jesus says “the child is not dead, but sleeping.” They laugh at Jesus which is never a good idea. He puts them all out of the house. Their lack of faith is not conducive to working a miracle. Jesus goes to her room and takes the little girl by the hand and tells her to rise, which she does. Jesus has the power to even raise the dead from their “sleep.” There is no laughter now, only amazement.

What lessons are here for us today? We are given a precious insight into the mind and heart of Jesus. Some healers tend to reduce human contact to a minimum. They tend to be non-tactile, even aloof and distant. Not so with Jesus. He mingled with the crowd. He made himself vulnerable, approachable. People reach out to touch Jesus. Jesus reaches out to touch them too. Jesus was willing to give of himself, to put himself out. Every time Jesus healed someone, “power went out from him.” Each cure took something out of him.

Faith also plays a very important part in healing. Jesus said to the woman in the Gospel, “Your faith has made you well.” He wanted to let her know that her faith played a part in her own healing. Jesus not only healed her; he also made her feel that she was worth something as a woman and a human being. She had something to offer too. She had a story to tell, a story about how faith in Jesus had brought her healing, a story that would be retold by others millions of times.

With the great crowd pressing upon him many people must have touched Jesus that day. But two people touched Jesus with faith. One, a desperate father of a dying child, and the other a poor, ill and frightened woman; one awakened the power of Jesus to heal with a touch, the other whose daughter’s hand Jesus had touched awakened her from death.

Life is suffering. Mark wrote his Gospel for fellow Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. Mark wanted to encourage them to be strong in faith even in seemingly hopeless situations

We all carry wounds of one kind or another. Some people have visible wounds. Others are wounded without appearing to be so. They carry invisible wounds, such as feelings of rejection, failure, guilt, worthlessness, bitterness, despair. How do you overcome the sufferings of life? Clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson recommends one way: "Try to be a better person so that you don't make it worse... Want to have a meaningful life? Try to be a better person..... Make the suffering of the world less." That is wise counsel in a world where resentment often turns into violence. The reading from Corinthians offers a second way to reduce suffering: If you have been blessed with abundance share your blessings with those in need.

We may not be able to cure, but it is within our power to care. Theodore Roosevelt is reputed to have said, "People won't care about how much you know until they know how much you care." Caring is a powerfully healing thing. It can cost us something too. Power will go out of us. But happily that power can be replenished, physically, through rest and spiritually, through prayer and sacrament as we tap into that inexhaustible source of life, healing and strength which is the life of our God.

We are called to continue the healing ministry of Jesus. Our lives are continually touching the lives of other people. With a little sympathy we can heal a wounded heart. With a little care we can ease a troubled mind. With a little of our time we might relieve someone's loneliness.

Dear friends, what can you do to make the suffering of the world less? What will you do?

Fr. Neil