***“Wholesome Forces”*** by S. Finlan, at The First Church, June 27, 2021

**Wisdom 1:14–15; 2:23; 3:1–5, 9**

14 For he created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them, and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. 15 For righteousness is immortal. . .

23 God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity. . .

1 The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. 2 In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, 3 and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. 4 For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. 5 Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself. . .

9 The faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones.

**Mark 5:21–34**

22One of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” 24So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. 26She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” 29Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” 31And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” 32He looked all round to see who had done it. 33But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Welcome to everybody here today. You are all welcome here as we seek to understand more about our heavenly Father and our heavenly family. Are you seeking something from God? What sort of blessing or encouragement do you need? How do you assimilate the answers you might receive? I’ll return to that. First I want to note that both Scriptures today have to do with someone *receiving* something from God. There is a remarkable optimism about that in the Wisdom of Solomon, and a remarkable risk of faith in the story from Mark. Let’s look at each text separately.

The Wisdom of Solomon says “The generative forces of the world are wholesome” (Wis 1:14). It also affirms the afterlife, where the righteous “will receive great good” (Wis 3:5). It asserts immortality as though it were automatic and without any resurrection, in this way sounding more like Plato than like the Bible, as when it says “righteousness is undying . . . their hope is full of immortality” (Wis 1:15; 3:4). Scholars are convinced that the author of Wisdom is in fact borrowing from Greek wisdom, and blending it with Hebrew wisdom, probably writing in the first century b.c., long after Solomon’s time. It was traditional in those days to attribute one’s wisdom writing to some prominent figure of the past.

The author has quite a bit to say about how the righteous people are often mistreated by the ignorant, but that the righteous will be vindicated at the last and rewarded with immortality. God knows if they have been faithful, and rewards them. This is another example of Wisdom’s optimism, although the author is fully aware of the injustices of earthly life.

In the gospel story we have a woman who suffers from a physical affliction, through no fault of her own. She has been living a shamed existence, because of the way people treated those whom they considered to be impure. Her excessive bleeding was considered a curse, and blood itself to be impure, so she would have lived a shunned and reduced life. We see that when she is called up by Jesus, she comes “in fear and trembling” (Mark 5:33). She was used to having to hide herself, to keep a low profile, and it would have been terrifying to be called on stage, so to speak. But she makes up her mind to make the approach and to seek healing. This public action took courage. What stands out to me is not her fear but her gumption, *despite* the fear. Jesus respects her, and he comforts her. In Matthew’s version of the story he says to her “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well” (Matt 9:22). Here, in Mark, he says, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” (5:34). “Take heart . . . go in peace.” These words are meant to lift her up.

Can you imagine how these words of kindness, along with the healing, would have changed her life? Her impurity would be gone, the stigma that was like a curse on her was suddenly removed. The chains of shame melted away. She would no longer be socially shunned. And the master had called her “daughter.” I can imagine her giving testimony in a church, years later. I am guessing she was still a humble person, even though receiving a lot of recognition because of her astounding story. After that story, Jesus goes on to also heal, or possibly raise from the dead, the synagogue leader’s daughter. Jesus says “The child is not dead but sleeping” (5:39), and then tells her to get up, and she does (5:41).

One thing I get from these healing stories is how responsive Jesus is to humble yet faithful people, and the fact that one does not need to be learned or brilliant or accomplished, only honest and needy and willing. In fact, it seems that the learned or educated or powerful people in these stories are often the ones who are too self-satisfied to ask for help, or too intellectually proud to submit themselves to learning anything new. They feel like they have it all; their material existence has made them comfortable and blind to their real spiritual needs. Their minds may be large, but they are like old wineskins that cannot stretch.

But Jesus had a special attraction to the humble people. Further, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt 9:36). And he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Matt 9:12; Luke 5:31), meaning only those who *know* they need help will ask for it. Only those who *know* they are spiritually sick will seek spiritual healing. Blessed indeed are the needy. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt 5:6).

Are you hungry for something from God? Are you looking for answers? Maybe it makes you restless, and does not feel like a blessing at all. God can make use of your hunger, your drive for answers. Even if it now takes the form of an argument with God that you are having. It probably signifies something very useful and appropriate, that God would like to spiritualize and energize. If you wrestle with God, you may receive a blessing, as Jacob did when he wrestled with an angel (Gen 32:24–29). Your impulse to seek answers is fundamentally good. As Wisdom said: “the generative forces of the world are wholesome” (1:14). That includes the forces within you. Your spiritual hungers are real—and legitimate.

Submit your questions, your struggles, your hungers to God. Submit to the long and slow work of God upon your every worthy impulse. God is within you, working. Make a decision to commit to the long-term struggle of bringing your particular gifts and questions to fruition. God is not offended by your questionings, but would like to make use of them. God will perfect that which concerns you (Ps 138:8).

But be ready to be changed, and possibly surprised. God may change the *nature* of the question from “why” to “how.” Jesus did this when his disciples asked him “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” and he answered “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (John 9:2–3). When we change our questions to *how* might God’s works be revealed, we stop going down the despairing path of asking *why* things happened. The *how*-questions show an openness to God’s works. The *why*-questions can sometimes lead to dead ends. (Drawing upon Laura Story’s *When God Doesn’t Fix It*, from <https://www.faithgateway.com/when-we-ask-why-god-why/#.YNXXS-hKiUk>).

So let the conversation begin; talk to God or Jesus. Express what you are truly seeking. Perhaps it is an understanding of events, or a desire to make things right between you and a family member. It could be a need for patience or trust. God wants all good things to come to you. You will certainly be welcomed into the conversation. God is Love.