

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
June 28, 2009

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Those of you who know me know that I am a manuscript preacher and as I was reflecting on the healing stories that we heard this morning, I found myself writing and writing and words kept tumbling out and I could even smell rose and cardamom in the crowd as the woman with the hemorrhage was being healed and I sort of thought “enough”. So today I am not in my comfort zone and I want to talk to you about why I think these stories are so important and to do my best to do so even when feeling vulnerable as so many of us do so often. Jesus was known as a healer. Now he was also known for his teaching in parables those somewhat opaque but evocative stories where we are invited to find ourselves in them. He was also known for his “open table”. That Jesus welcomed anyone and everyone to his table to sup and there was always enough for everyone. Everyone was welcome. Everyone is equal at the table. Everyone is provided for. He was also known as a healer and people would come from near and far just to be near him. There was something about the presence of Jesus that helped people to feel their own sense of being maybe even being recalibrated or knit together in a fresh way that gave them a sense of wholeness and fullness and realizing the gift of what it means to be alive. So there was something about the very presence of Jesus, the nearness of Jesus, the touch of Jesus that people were drawn to; people did everything they could to get near him. And I think about us here today being here in church. We come here knowing that this is a place where we talk about Jesus and because he is known as a healer, we all know that, it makes me wonder if we come here because we hope that maybe we will get a glimpse of him or a sense of his presence or that we might feel that transforming power at work in us to help us come around right. Jesus is known in many many places in the world, but certainly we come here knowing that Jesus will be talked about and I’ll be hoping that even Jesus will be present. I don’t know what we make of the healing stories actually. I think that some of us may think of them as particular events that happened a long time ago to a particular person and Jesus was there then and something kind of miraculous happened and for some us that might be inspiring and evocative enough to help open us to the possibility of Jesus’ continuing presence in our lives today. And for those of us for whom those stories just in their literal description excite our spiritual imagination and open us up a little bit more, I know those stories are at work in us. But for some of us the literalization of those stories may also really limit them – well, that happened then to her and those were her circumstances; they’re not mine and so really how do those stories speak to me today anyway? I suggest that all of the healing stories in our gospel are intended to speak to us on a multitude of levels and that they have a power that continues to move across time and the ages. And let me use the story of the woman with the hemorrhage as an example of how we might hear that story as a story about us. This woman had a hemorrhage for twelve years. Her very life blood was flowing away from her and out of her, something was draining her of her vitality and it had been going on for a long time and she knew that she was dying and not living. Maybe there’s something about that that we can connect to; maybe there’s something about the way that we have been structuring our lives for

years and years that we realize is actually taking the very life force out of us rather than helping us to feel more whole and alive and maybe we've come to a point where we're willing to risk coming to one who we know will receive us and can move us in such a way that a kind of transformation can take place. The woman with the hemorrhage did just that; she sought out Jesus. We're not told why she had her illness or the exact nature of it so there's no condemnation here; there's no moral judgment, there's no "if you had only done this – that " but what we do know is that something was amiss and regulated the balance of her life to where the very life blood killing her. She comes to Jesus and Jesus even calls her "Daughter" which for me suggests that he is even willing to identify with her in such a way that says "you and I are really of one flesh". I call you "daughter" and in being with her and her being open to him something happened and she knew deep inside of her that something had changed and that it was vital for her. Maybe the story of the woman with the hemorrhage speaks to us in some way about how our life is being spent. And the little girl who was at the verge of death and then she dies and her father is of course just dismayed. Well maybe we can understand that story in this kind of way. Maybe there's something in us that died; maybe when we were even twelve and that whatever happened to us had such an impact, that part of us seemed to have died and there was a big part of us that just shut down. When the presence of Jesus comes into our life and Jesus takes you by the hand and says "get up!" you're sleeping, you're not dead. You can awaken anew and even that part of yourself that you that long sense pasted off as having no life in you, there's still a part of you that can come together and can be whole and has a whole new future ahead. There's still opportunity for fruition ahead of you. Or maybe the little girl represents a part of our life that didn't even get a start. She was twelve so she had not even arrived at her own maturity and yet at twelve she dies. Maybe some of us are having to grieve something that didn't even get a fair start and we know how wrenching that is because it seems so unfair and there is no just cause for it. But Jesus comes into the picture and Jesus says "get up; trust me; there's more life to come". I think these healing stories are really important. I think that we all seek wholeness. I think its part of the human condition that even though life and existence is a gift that it also will wound us. As Garrison Keeler said many years ago "we can't live very long without accumulating grief". I think he's right. But there's no moral judgment in that; it just is. So life does have its wounding nature, but I think that our deep impulse is to move towards wholeness – "to move towards wholeness" – I think that is why we're going to Jesus. He embodies that; he also imparts it. When I think of these two stories today – the one about the woman with the hemorrhage and the one about the little girl, the number twelve shows up in both stories so what that tells me is that maybe we are supposed to connect the stories in some way. What came up for me was that maybe our longing for wholeness involves two things – healing and mourning. Maybe that's just part of what our journey is about; it's about healing and healing our wounds and the wounds of existence – we all come by them honestly – and mourning. Know that we all have an accumulation of grief and that we have to deal with that and that's just part of our movement towards wholeness. And I think what we are really called to do is to move toward that which we know is good for us and to know that in our being and continue to move toward that which is good and life living. And I profoundly believe that Jesus is that way, that he can show us the way to that kind of wholeness. And I also believe there is something about his presence that is

very real and palpable and available to all of us now. So what I invite you to do this morning is maybe make yourselves a little vulnerable too and when you come forward for the Eucharist to come forward with an openness to be touched by the healing presence of Jesus. You know at the end of our gospel today with the little girl he says "get up and give her something to eat". We need food for the journey. Our longing for wholeness – we need to be sustained, we need to be nurtured and nourished and at a very deep level. And at its best that's what a community like this can offer one another – nurture and support at a very deep level and this open table which is really set for you and for me and from this table we receive a kind of food for the journey that can nourish us at a deep level and sustain us in our journey towards wholeness which I think for all of us requires feeling and mourning. So I suggest that this morning you think about an area in your own life that needs wholeness – that longs for it -- and maybe one of the two stories, about the woman with the hemorrhage will relate to you or speak to you in some way; maybe the story about something that has died a long time ago in you or that never had a fair chance, maybe that will speak to you, but maybe there's something else and what I invite you to do is when you come forward to receive your food for the journey, to reach out your hand and know that you are encountering and touching the very presence of Jesus who is giver of life and I suggest that in receiving that bread he will touch you too. And come in full trust even in your vulnerability and my prayer for all of us is that like the woman with the hemorrhage that we will know the presence and power of Jesus in our life.