

Love for Every-body

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Year A: Pentecost 2: Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

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⁹As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. ¹⁰And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹²But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

¹⁸While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." ¹⁹And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, ²¹for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." ²²Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. ²³When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. ²⁵But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. ²⁶And the report of this spread throughout that district.

Jesus is committed to the saving of not only minds and souls, but physical bodies as well. God has mercy and love for embodied sinners. We too, are called to love every-body; including our own.

Beloved of God, may God's grace and peace surround and fill you this day. Amen

Has anyone been watching our Denver Nuggets play this week? If you have, perhaps like me, you've been marveling at the human body. These bodies of ours are amazing gifts from God. Like Dr. Suess might say...See how they jump! See how they turn! See how they throw, run, and block. How quickly our brains send signals to all the nerves and muscles to make each maneuver. The Psalmist is correct when he speaks of God's divine creative power; "we are fearfully and marvelously made." (Ps 139:14)

Our three stories from Matthew this morning are very physical and they contain bodies. Jesus' body who sees and sits. Matthew's body who stands and follows.

The synagogue leader's daughter's body, which is lying dead. The hemorrhaging woman's body reaches out to touch.

We live in a culture obsessed with bodies, looking and feeling the best you can for as long as you can. And if we happen to be older, or not have the 'standard' physique, well then, forget seeing yourself in an ad on tv for any sensual perfume or cologne.

Yet, realistically, we think about our bodies with some regularity! We have appointments at the doctor's office. Illnesses or ache and pains, pop up without warning. As we age, we notice that it takes longer to heal and these parts, well, some of them just don't work like they used to.

Isn't it refreshing to see Jesus caring for people's physical bodies? Jesus clearly was committed to liberating people's minds and spirits. Yet in our stories today, he also is invested in liberating people's physical bodies.

The leader of the synagogue who came to Jesus with the request to bring life back into his daughter, was an important man. His name was Jairus. Jairus would have been an elected leader, in charge of all the daily workings of the synagogue. He likely was one of those leaders who wanted Jesus stopped.

None-the-less, here he is kneeling before Jesus making a request, not as a leader of the church, but as a dad. "Come and lay your hands on her body. You can bring her back to life."

Paired with this story is the hemorrhaging woman. She had been bleeding for twelve years. Because of the blood, anything and anyone she came into contact with became unclean. This disease had rendered her an outcast. She couldn't worship or have any relationships with family or friends. She was figuratively already dead.

Yet, here she is reaching out to touch one of the tassels on Jesus' outer garment, reaching for the elusive healing that is yet to come.

Christian perspectives on physical bodies have for the most part, been negative. We read in St. Paul's New Testament letters, admonitions about lust and passions. These arose from a Hellenistic context. 'Greek thought created a mind-body dualism in which the former was superior to the latter.' Furthermore, the soul has been thought to be superior to the body. (<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of->

[hymns-sacred-the-body](#)) It's no wonder we have such a time talking about the gift of sexuality in our broader church!

But for Jesus, in these moments, this distraught father and bleeding woman, are the center of the universe! He stops. Time stands still as seemingly only Jesus and the woman connect by word and sight. “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” Can you imagine her surprise? Her joy? Her amazement? Jesus has healed her body and in doing so, healed her mind and spirit also.

For the dead girl, Jesus doesn't hold a grudge against her father, this leader of the synagogue. His only intention is to help. He takes the girl's hand and raises her up. For both of these females, in that moment of their greatest need, they are to Jesus the whole world. His entire focus is upon healing and restoring their physical bodies back to life and health.

W.B. Yeats once wrote, “The love of God is infinite for every human soul, because every human soul is unique; no other can satisfy the same need in God.” (The Gospel of Matthew; Volume 1. Revised Edition. William Barclay. The Westminster Press. Philadelphia. 1977. Pg. 347.) I would add, the love of God is infinite yes, for every human soul, but also, for everybody...every-body.

The irony of this story is that the Lord of the universe, fully embodied Himself, makes himself ‘unclean’ by interacting with a bleeding woman and touching a dead body. For Jesus, that clearly is of much less importance than responding to physical needs. He brings God's saving power to ordinary people in their ordinary and extraordinary needs. Each and every – body is important and loved by God.

Pastor and theologian, Rev. Dr. Ruth Duck penned these words to a hymn titled, “Sacred the Body” : *“Sacred the body God has created, temple of Spirit that dwells deep inside. Cherish each person; nurture creation. Treat flesh as holy, that love may abide.”* (Words: Ruth C. Duck, © 1997 The Pilgrim Press. Hymn #39 from Circles of Care: Hymns and Songs by Ruth C. Duck, edited by Arthur G. Clyde, © 1998 by The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio. Used by permission. All rights reserved.)

I fully realize that these stories of healing may be hard to hear. We may be asking, “Why doesn't God heal my illness? Why is my body so weak, or sick, or tired?” Our healing might not come in the time we wish. But God knows our every ache and pain.

There are many ways to see God's healing touch at work. It comes through miracles like these stories. It comes through ordinary time and people God has given the gifts of healing to: doctors, nurses, physical and mental therapists. Remember God's healing can also come through friends, support groups, family members who pray and love. Never forget your body is sacred to God. Don't stop searching for healing. Don't stop treating your body with deep respect.

Yours is a body that Jesus loves. So too, are the people's bodies struggling with all the smoke in New York City right now. So too, are the dead bodies lying on battlefields in Ukraine. Tall or short, wide or thin, male, female or transgender, people of color or white; each and every person is sacred to God. Those who are differently-abled, those who struggle with addictions. Sacred each body who jumps, turns, runs and sacred all who can only sit on the sidelines. Thanks be to God for these incredible bodies we inhabit. Amen!