

2 Corinthians 8:12-15

¹²For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. ¹³I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵As it is written,

“The one who had much did not have too much,
and the one who had little did not have too little.”

Mark 5:21-43

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

²¹When Jesus had crossed again in the boat⁽⁹⁾ to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²²Then one 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 around 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.”

³⁵While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶But overhearing⁽⁹⁾ what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not

fear, only believe.”³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.”⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was.⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!”⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

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“She Spent All She Had”

Mark 5:21-43; 2 Corinthians 8:12-15

Kerra Becker English

This sentence from Mark could easily be ripped from the lead paragraph of a story from today’s headlines, “She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all she had, and she was no better, but rather grew worse.” Now it has always been true that physicians can’t solve every single human ailment. And yet what I find startlingly true and wildly contemporary about this statement is that the woman had spent all her money trying to get better. Even back then there was a financial exchange taking place to seek health care.

I get it. Health care professionals must survive both the rigor and the expense of their lengthy education process now in order to know what they know and do what they do. It’s certainly can be an honest and admirable way to make a living. I have met many physicians who see their vocation as a calling from God to use their talents to be a healer. And yet, in another reading of this text, Eugene Peterson’s translation, called “The Message” – the blame is placed squarely on the physicians – not necessarily that she couldn’t be healed through their methods – but that they had taken all her money knowing the fragility of her situation. He translates those same verses as, “A long succession of physicians had treated her, and treated her badly, taking all her money and leaving her worse off than before.”

In our own world, there’s plenty of blame to go around – from hospitals who know how to set up billing better than medical charts, and insurance companies that lobby against anything that gets remotely close to universal health care, to pharmaceutical giants that make a mint on every

medicine. So, I'm sure that we could have a lively debate about HOW to solve the problem that people lose their life savings over seeking treatment for medical conditions, but my hunch is that we would all agree that our system for the distribution of health care in this country could do better. According to a year old article in *Newsweek* that is making the rounds again because of budget considerations and the Affordable Care Act, the Commonwealth Fund, a think tank that evaluates health care nation to nation every three years, puts the United States dead last of all the developed nations, ranking poorly on "access, administrative efficiency, equity and health care outcomes," adding that the United States is also the nation that spends the most MONEY on health care (per person, not just because we are a big country). I would assume that we want to believe that our health care system has improved both in quality of care and distribution of that care since biblical days and surely it has, but it is still true even in a country with the depth of medical knowledge and resources as the United States that a person can spend all they have to get better, only to make things worse by ending up not only sick, but sick and financially destitute.

The woman in this biblical story was both – sick for more than 12 years, and now impoverished because she sought the care she needed to try to get better to no avail. Jesus was her last and only hope for wellness. "If I can only touch his clothes," she prays, "Then I will be made well." It's the very last plea of many people, even in our own society. And sadly, there are those who lie in wait to take advantage of those situations to squeeze every last dime out of folks who don't even have a pocket full of change to call their own. It's not just the hospitals and insurance companies either who have gotten good at billing the poor – it's the churches. The sick and poor reach out to the church for healing when their situation is desperate, and with reason. They long for the compassion of touching the hem of Jesus' garment and being made well. Now what

makes me screaming angry is that there are churches who then play out the horrific part of this story, “If only you give enough,” they say, “Jesus will make you well.”

This is where the 2 Corinthians text comes in about generosity, about the relationship between those who know abundance and those who truly know scarcity. We are a nation that possesses great wealth, and yet the statistics on poverty in our country are staggering. In 2016, 40.6 million people, that’s 12.7% of the nation lived below the poverty line and remember that the poverty line has been officially drawn such that a family of four is said to be able to live on \$24,000/year. I wouldn’t want to try that sort of budget on for size in my family! So many people are living on that edge of just being able to make it, knowing they would be wiped out with one bone-breaking accident, with one particularly bad case of the flu.

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he begins by commending the little churches of Macedonia. Even though they were poor, they felt an overwhelming abundance by knowing the love of God, so they poured themselves out in gifts that helped others. In contrast, the rich Corinthians in the cosmopolitan communities were going to be tested by Paul in their generosity. He wouldn’t command them to give, but he was certainly trying to show them that they had all they needed to make a big difference – even if it was still sitting in their pockets! It’s a question of balance, Paul tells us, “between your present abundance and their need.” I love the saying he ends on, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

In the story from Mark, we actually have a story within a story, the story of the healing of Jairus’ daughter, and the story of the woman healed from her hemorrhage. Jesus compassion was so deep and powerful that he could get a dead child out of bed and heal a woman just from the touch of his clothing. We hear those stories and we are inclined to think that they are the kind of miracles that ONLY happened in Jesus’ time. But I dare say that the hope of the church is that

we stake our claims to the healing arts as well – not that we can pray away serious disease or eliminate poverty with a well-written sermon or church proclamation – but that we are moved to act with compassion as Jesus did. That we are moved by women who have lost all they had trying to get well. That we shed tears with fathers and mothers who will try anything to save their children from death.

It is the job of Christians to care. It is the job of Christians to want healing and work for that fair balance. I like putting these two texts together because Jesus is always right there in the particular situations with people. We know the names. We know the conditions. These were individuals that were healed in his presence. And Paul tells us what the community can do when it works together. It can change the scope of broader issues. Even the Macedonian churches, with what little they had, came together in their joy of the gospel, and raised money for those who needed it more. Paul calls the Corinthian churches to do the same. It reminds me that we got a phone call from the denomination last year asking us what we did to get interest up in the Pentecost offering, because as a small church, we made such a significant contribution. As you know, that offering has grown here because we see the need right around us for impoverished children to have a place to go in the summer. Our YMCA camperships make a huge difference in the lives of those kids.

I've talked a lot today about the poverty and pressures in our own nation because it's what I know better and read about most often – but those conditions exist around the world. Poverty here isn't even the same as those who live on a dollar a day worldwide. The medical issues we face here are compounded in regions of the world where access to a hospital involves not only cost, but distance, and the lack of facilities to do what we can get in any Richmond area hospital.

But not being able to see the end of these problems isn't a reason to give up and isn't a reason to shut off into our own more comfortable lives and forget about it.

To follow Jesus means that we will care as he cared. To listen to the hope Paul has for the church to make a difference is to live our own lives as though we were making a difference.

This week I went to see the movie about our own Presbyterian Saint, Saint Fred Rogers. Mr. Rogers believed that he could make a difference in the lives of children through television. He lived that vision completely through his own doubts as he was asked to and tackled even the world's most difficult problems and explained them on a 4-year-old level. The scene where he came on public television after the 9-11 attacks and spoke about the helpers had me in tears, as did several other scenes as well. Like Mr. Rogers, we can choose to keep doing the good in the world, over and over, and over again – because it can, it will make a difference, even if we aren't seeing the results charted perfectly in front of us.

God help us all as we seek to repair the world – to make it a more loving, more caring, more equitable, and just place to be. Amen.

May God bless us with **discomfort** at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with **anger** at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with **tears** to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough **foolishness** to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.