

August 19, 2012

The National Presbyterian Church

The Price of Healing

Mark 5:25-34

Rev. Dr. Barry C. Black
Chaplain of the United States Senate

Let us pray. Thank you our Father for the Balm in Gilead. Speak through lips of clay, for we are listening. Through Jesus Christ our lord we pray, Amen.

One of the great anxieties of a guest preacher is that you may preach too long. You don't want to preach longer than people are accustomed to experiencing. I was at a church a few weeks ago when I said to the pastor, "How long do I have to preach?" He said to me, "You are the Chaplain of the United States Senate. You can preach for as long as you desire, but the people leave at 12:00!"

I want to talk today about the price of healing and about paying the cost for the cure. There is a desperate need of healing in our world. I grew up in the toxic pathology of an inner city ghetto in Southwest Baltimore. My mother, a single parent, very wisely provided a monetary incentive for my siblings and me to memorize the Bible. She was attempting to inoculate us against the pathology of our environment and so she gave us five cents for each Bible verse that we could quote. We would stand before her and give chapter and verse. She insisted on the King James Version. She said, 'If it was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for us.' And we would quote Scripture and get a nickel a verse.

So if you would go to my home you would see my four siblings and me combing the Scriptures, not looking for spiritual nourishment, but for short verses. We were assiduously pursuing the low-hanging fruit. And to this very day, my favorite Bible verses are the short ones, okay. And I could tell you I ended up with seven siblings. If you gathered them they could quote them as well. John 11:35, "Jesus wept." (My favorite Bible verse.) Luke 17:32, "Remember Lot's wife." (a powerful verse). First Thessalonians 5 is a treasure trove; verse 16 says: "Rejoice evermore." Yeah, that's it, that's the verse, okay. Verse 17: "Pray without ceasing." Okay, verse 18: "Don't quench the spirit." Uh hu;, rather 19 and 20 is: "Despise not prophesying." So here this wonderful treasure trove that we discovered! But what my mother knew was that when the Word becomes flesh, when your children assimilate the theological constructs of Scripture, it brings healing.

Now I grew up in the late '40s early '50s and when I was growing up segregation was legal. I went to college in Alabama when it was legal. I actually

sat and listened to Martin King's speech and participated in the desegregation of lunch counters there in Alabama. But the Word of God that I memorized just to get the nickels, (of course mom eventually put me on a flat rate) brought emotional healing to me. I read one day ten-cents worth of Scripture, First Peter, Chapter 1, verses 18 and 19. That's good enough for a dime. But it did something more than just give me a dime. It gave me a defense shield against anything that would try to eviscerate my self-esteem. I was only ten years of age. And I read: "For we are not redeemed by corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus, as a lamb without spot or blemish." And to my pre-pubescent mind came the insight that the value of an object is based upon the price someone is willing to pay. And I comprehended the fact that God sent his Son to give his life for me. It infused me with such a spirit of somebody-ness that nothing that happened to me after that could change my sense that the image of God had been stamped on me... and that I was of inestimable value. That was the healing power of the Word of God.

In order to experience the healing power of the Word of God we must pay the cost for the cure. Our blessed Lord came to bring healing to our planet. In Luke's gospel, Chapter 4, Jesus was in his home town and he stood up and read from Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bring deliverance to captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are bruised." He came on a mission of healing and he said in John, Chapter 20, verse 21, "As the Father has sent me, even so do I..." What? Anyone? "... Even so send I you." He left the chants of cherubim and the songs of seraphim. He left unpolluted breezes and un-darkened days. He left the Father's presence and a rainbow-encircled throne in a land where night never comes... to have a breakthrough at Bethlehem, to bring healing to our world. And he says to you and me, people of faith: I send you to do the same thing, to bring healing to our world.

In the story of the judgment in Matthew, Chapter 25, God is not interested in your theological orthodoxy. The judge of the universe does not make the query: Did you sprinkle or immerse? Do you believe in trans-substantiation or con-substantiation? None of that. Six pointed questions, each dealing with healing in our world: Did you feed the hungry? Did you give water to the thirsty? Did you clothe the naked? Did you visit the sick? Did you minister to the incarcerated? Did you take care of the strangers? I teach a Bible study at the Senate; believe it or not both sides of the aisle come. And I told them the issue of immigration is the issue of: Will you take care of the stranger? What about the stranger who is within your gate? Our blessed Lord gave us principles to bring healing to our world and he wants us to be his agents of healing, continuing his messianic thrust of setting the captives free.

I heard a story about two construction workers, Lester and Rodney; they were taking a lunch break. Lester opened his lunch box and exclaimed: "Not baloney sandwiches *again*?!? This is the third time this week I've had baloney sandwiches. I hate baloney sandwiches." Rodney said, "Well Lester,

why don't you ask your wife to fix you something different?" And Lester responded "I'm not married. I made these sandwiches myself." Sisters and brothers, most of the baloney we find in our lives we put there ourselves. And we're unwilling to pay the cost for the cure. You want healing in your intellectual development? David said in 119th Psalm, verse 99: "I have more wisdom than all of my teachers because I meditate upon your Word." Do you want healing in terms of your spiritual growth and development? Proverbs, Chapter 1, verse 7 says: "The fear of the Lord [reverential awe] is the beginning of wisdom." Do you want healing in terms of your physical well-being? First Corinthians Chapter 9, verse 27 says: "I keep my body under control and make it my slave, lest after I have preached to others, I myself will be disqualified." Another way of phrasing that is: you don't have to have that third piece of apple pie. I keep my body under control and make it my slave. Do you want national healing? Second Chronicles, Chapter 7, verse 14 says: pay the cost for the cure. "If my people called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways. Then will I hear from heaven, forgive their sins and heal their land."

We need healing in America today. And God says, 'I'm not talking about every American. If just the folk who show up on Sunday morning, the folk called by my name will cultivate a spirit of humility, will engage in fervent intercessory prayer, will turn from wickedness then will I hear from heaven, forgive their sins and bring healing to their land.' You recall in Genesis, Chapter 18, as Abraham negotiated for the survival of Sodom and Gomorrah, he started out with 50, but he ended up... he said, "Lord if there are *ten* righteous people left in those cities will you spare the cities?" And God said: "We'll do it." Abraham did the math, He said, 'Well, there's Lot, his children, his wife and they must have been given Bibles. There's got to be ten folk there so I'll back off of that.' No wonder the Bible says in Matthew, Chapter 5: "You are the salt of the earth." This was before refrigeration and salt preserves. Let's get rid of the baloney that we've placed there ourselves and pay the cost for the cure.

And so in our Gospel lesson we meet a woman who needs healing. And there is a price for healing. For twelve years she had spent her money on physicians and the Bible says she hadn't gotten better. The Talmud had eleven cures for hemorrhaging. And I'm sure she tried all of those; many of them had nothing to do with good medicine and more with superstition. One was: get the ashes of an ostrich, place it in a lemon napkin in the summer time and a wool napkin in the winter time, and carry that around with you and you will be cured of your issue of blood. She tried it all; and like so many of us, she came to Jesus as her last resort. And yet, I'm happy to tell you, the good news is: even if Jesus is your last chance he is still your best chance. Hallelujah! She came to Jesus.

Now she couldn't even go into the synagogue because she was ceremonially unclean. She was cut off from the homilies of the rabbis. But she started talking to herself, and she said, "If I can only touch his clothes..." ["...the hem of his garment" says the King James Authorized Version; the rabbis had four tassels that would hang from their robe]. If I can just reach out even though

I have experienced debilitation because of this disease, if I can just reach out and get a hold of one of those tassels, I will be made whole.

Now there are actually two stories of healing in this Bible passage. Because immediately before this woman's encounter with Jesus, a ruler of the synagogue named Jairus came to him and said: "Dr. Jesus, my daughter is dying. Will you come to my home and heal her?" And Jesus said, "Let's go." So they started walking. And you can see Jairus: 'Get out of the way, it's an emergency.' They didn't have sirens. 'Get, get, get move out the way, Dr. Jesus is on the way to...'. 'Please, would you move, please, please, please, excuse me, I don't mean to be rude, we're on - - my daughter is dying, okay. She was barely alive when I left home...' And suddenly it's not the crowd... Jesus stops. Okay, Jairus is: "Doc, we - - we got, you now, we, we..." "Somebody touched me." I believe it was Peter. The Bible says the disciple, but Peter was the one who always put his mouth in motion before he put his brain in gear. He said, 'Lord, what are you talking about - somebody's touching you? Everybody's *always* reaching out at you, want to 'Hi-five' you... get your autograph. What do you mean somebody touching you?' Jesus said, "No, no, no, this was different. Power went out of me." Virtue went out of me. There was a cost for this cure. Who touched me?

My friend you can come to church, listen to the beautiful hymns and I'll tell you the Summer Choir had it going on today! There is a Balm in Gilead, okay. Listen to the hymns and still not touch him. Matthew, Chapter 7 says: "Not everyone who says unto me 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, did we not prophecy in your name and in your name cast out devils?" Then I shall say to them, "Depart from me, [this is astonishing, Matthew. Chapter 7] I never knew you." Not... 'We knew each other once and you backslid.' I never knew you. And you never challenged their assertion of casting out demons in his name and doing many mighty works in his name. Everybody, a whole Negro spiritual talking about his name.

We must touch him. We must make the contact. Who touched me? And this woman embarrassed about her malady. "I did it, Dr. Jesus. I - - I - - I'm sorry. I hope I didn't do anything wrong". And the Bible says she told all. That was a long testimony, okay; she told it from start to finish. 'Twelve years ago it started happening. I went to Dr. Smith. I went to Dr. Slygo, I went to Dr... so-and-so.' On and on it went. And Jairus is: 'What is going on here?' And yet through the words of her testimony, she released healing. She and our Lord paid the cost for the cure.

So let's unpack this pericope because there are some principles here to enable us to pay the cost for the cure. **Principle number one: give of your substance and strength to bring healing.** So many of us want to bring healing to our world, but we're not willing to give of our substance. We are not willing to give of our strength. The Bible says in Luke, Chapter 6, "Give and it shall be given unto you." Galatians, Chapter 6, verse 2 says: "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." We've got to give of our substance and our strength. A wonderful parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke, Chapter 10, a

man wounded on the highway desperately needed healing. Priests came by; he's ceremonially unclean. I cannot touch him. A Levite came by and had a rationalization; a Gentile (a Samaritan) comes and gives of his substance and his strength. He dresses the wounds. He takes the man to an inn. He says, 'If there are additional expenses put it on my tab.' Are you willing to give of your substance and your strength? I think of Gandhi, born in Bombay, educated as a barrister in England. He went to South Africa and was thrown out of the first class section of a train; actually thrown off the train. It so transformed him that he gave up his substance and his strength to bring healing to his beloved India. And who would have guessed at the time when he was assassinated in 1948 that the seeds he planted for healing would inspire a young African American drum major for justice... and drum major for truth... and drum major for righteousness, Martin King. Give of your substance and give of your strength to bring healing.

Principle number two: exercise majestic faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is..." What? Very good: "... impossible to please God." Now, if there's anyone you want to be on the good side of, it is the transcendent God. And yet the only spiritual attribute that Scripture says without it, it is impossible to please God is: faith. Faith turns God on. If you want to please God, exercise faith; and the greater the faith, the more you please him. Our blessed Lord encountered the centurion in Matthew, Chapter 8. The centurion came to him and said, 'My servant is dying could you please come... [No] ...' My servant is dying would you please heal him?' and Jesus said, 'Let's go.' The centurion, a military man, said, 'You don't have to go to my house Dr. Jesus. I am a man under authority. I say 'Jump' and the troops say: 'How high, sir?' Speak the word and my servant will be healed.' Now, only twice in the New Testament is this particular Greek verb that Jesus was 'amazed.' It's difficult to amaze Jesus. The Bible says Jesus was amazed by this Gentile soldier. Jesus said, in effect: Who are you? How could you possibly know that I can heal long-distance? The only other time that Greek verb for 'amazed' is used is in Mark, Chapter 6, verses 5 and 6, where Jesus goes home and his hometown people reject him: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" And the Bible says (Mark Chapter 6, verse 5): "He could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." He was only able to lay hands on a few sick people and the Bible says he was amazed at their unbelief.

Are we missing blessings in America because of our failure to exercise majestic faith? George Bernard Shaw said, "Some people see things that are and ask: Why? I dream things that never were and ask, Why not?" Jack Kennedy in May of 1961 says: 'We're gonna put a man on the moon by the end of the decade and bring him back safely to earth.' And when I heard that, I thought he was tripping. 'He's out of his mind. It's not 'gonna happen, okay!' I am bilingual and so; but it happened! If the exercise of faith in the secular realm can achieve the ostensibly impossible, think of what would happen if we pay the cost for the cure and exercise majestic faith! It took majestic faith for this woman to say: 'If I can reach out and touch the hem of his garment I will be made whole.'

The third principle, persevere through the obstacles. Inevitably, when you are attempting to bring healing, there will be obstacles. That is why Galatians Chapter 6, verse 9 tells us: "Do not become weary in well doing, for in due season you will reap if you faint not." And in the parable of the Sower in Matthew, Chapter 13, 75% of the seeds miss pay dirt. There will be obstacles. In Mark's gospel, Chapter 2, some friends bringing a paralytic buddy to Jesus. They get to where Jesus is preaching. The front door is closed, but as the philosopher J.R. Ewing said: 'If you can't get in the front door, go around to the back.' So they went around to the back [And I see we've got some philosophy majors here!] and couldn't get into the back. So the Bible says they went up to the roof and went through the roof and lowered this man where Jesus was preaching. They lowered this man at the feet of Jesus. And the Bible says in Mark's gospel, Chapter 2, verses 1 through 12: when Jesus saw their faith, he first of all gave the man spiritual healing because spiritual healing is often the prelude to physical healing. He said to the paralytic: "Your sins be forgiven you." Let's not major in minors. Let's start with spiritual healing. And then, when the religious leaders said, "Did you hear what he just said? Isn't that blasphemy?" Jesus said "Which is easier? To say your sins be forgiven you or get up and walk?"

The power of our blessed Lord bringing healing to those who would persevere through the obstacle. Imagine this diminutive woman drained through the years, weakened, pushing through that crowd and reaching, persevering through and finally hitting pay dirt. And if we had to pay the cost for the cure we must not get discouraged. I remember listening to Martin when he would talk about 'keeping on, keep on keeping on.' We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is young, but it bends toward justice. We shall overcome because Carlisle was right. No lie can live forever. We shall overcome because William Cullen Bryant is right: 'Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, yet that scaffold sways the future. And behind them the unknown standard caught within the shadows keeping watch above his own.' ¹ We shall overcome because the Bible is right. You shall reap what you sew. Persevere through the obstacles.

And finally, bring healing with your testimony. This woman is outed by Jesus. She tells her story and as she tells her story Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, is listening and he hears this melody hit twelve years ago and he remembers: my daughter is twelve years of age. He places this woman's story of victorious healing into juxtaposition with his story of despair. He needs a stronger foundation on which to base his faith. And when he finishes, immediately the next verse, a servant from Jairus' home comes and says: "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the master any longer." And I believe it was that woman's testimony that gave Jairus enough faith to follow Jesus to his home anyhow, where our blessed Lord raised his daughter from the dead. In this very chapter, Mark, Chapter 5, Jesus heals the demoniac of the Gerasenes. This man nobody could contain... running among the tombs... breaking the chains by which they tried to bind him. And when Jesus sends squealing demons into oinking pigs, this man says, "Let me go with you Jesus. I don't wanna stay

here.” And Jesus says: ‘No, we need your testimony.’ Hallelujah! Go and tell your friends and family what I have done for you. Isn’t that what Revelation Chapter 12, verse 11 is talking about? They overcame through the blood of the Lamb and through the words of their testimony.

Pay the cost for the cure, National Presbyterian Church. All kinds of problems are in our world, but give of your substance and your strength. Exercise a majestic faith. Matthew 17 says if you’ve got faith the size of the grain of a mustard seed you can move mountains. Persevere through the obstacles. If it doesn’t hit good ground, keep planting the seeds and watering the seeds anyway. And overcome through the words of your testimony. Let your testimony transform lives.

*I heard the Savior say thy strength indeed is small
Child of weakness, watch and pray. Find in me, thine all in all.
And when before the throne I stand in him complete,
I’ll cast my trophies down, cast them down at Jesus’ feet.
Jesus paid it all; all to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain.
He washed it white as snow.*

National Presbyterian Church - pay the cost for the cure. God love you.

- 1 A portion of the closing paragraph of a speech by The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered on March 14, 1968 at Grosse Pointe High School, Grosse Pointe Michigan. [From the web site of the Grosse Pointe Historical Society – 381 Kercheval Avenue – Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan 48236].

Dr. Barry C. Black Copyright © 2012 All Rights Reserved.

THE NATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
4101 Nebraska Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20016
www.NationalPres.org 202.537.0800