

## The Greatest Healing of All

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

When I was in my second year of seminary, I was required to do what all seminarians were required to do – and that is, serve as a chaplain for 3 months in a medical facility of my choice... being that I had planned to spend my summer on Long Island that year, I served at a local hospital in a town called Smithtown... it wasn't a very big hospital (but it did have an oncology ward) which is where I spent most of my time that summer ('learning the ropes') ...

As you can imagine, I found myself confronted with some very heartbreaking stories that were filled with overwhelming emotions: lives cut short by illness, loved ones struggling to cope, patients experiencing pain and discomfort, and me (not knowing what to say)...

But I'll never forget a woman I met that first week (named Linda Little)... she had been diagnosed with a brain tumor that was making its way down the base of her spine (limiting her mobility and taking away her life rather quickly)... her husband and children always seemed to be by her side (along with her Bible – and - books of devotion)... and needless to say, when I first entered into her room I couldn't help but feel sympathy (not only for Linda) but for her whole family...

But what amazed me the most about Linda was that she didn't want sympathy... in fact, Linda's personality struck me as surprisingly cheerful – as upbeat and inspiring – and she certainly had a positive outlook for the future... and no, she didn't believe that she was going to *beat the cancer* (in fact, she told me right from the beginning that she didn't believe that she had much time left in her 'mortal body') but she was so certain that our Lord was with her (that even the doctors and nurses who cared for her seemed to draw strength from this woman)... in fact, it was almost impossible *not to*...

And so, after visiting her for a few days (and getting to know her) – I said, "*Linda, what makes your faith so strong?*" ...

She said, "*As soon as the doctor gave me the news of my condition – I wasted no time and went to the Lord in prayer (to get a second opinion)... and I know that Jesus (the Great Physician) was the only one who could give me what I need*" ... and what she seemed to have – which was noticeable to everyone - was peace...

Our reading this morning from Mark's Gospel tells a different story...now while it does tell us about another woman who was sick (in fact, it mentions that she had an issue with bleeding for *12 long years*) this is a story about a woman who had grown desperate – and lonely – and scared - (and willing to do anything in her power to end her own suffering on her own)...

In fact, I've read that whatever pain she might have experienced because of her hemorrhaging (and whatever embarrassment she faced because of her disease) paled in comparison to the pain that was thrust upon her (by her own community)... and I say that because in Judaism (a woman who's found bleeding is considered to be 'ritually unclean' and *defiled* in the eyes of God)...

This meant that if she was married her husband couldn't touch her - and they certainly couldn't have children - unless he wanted to be defiled as well... if she was single (she couldn't date)... her family couldn't hug her (or kiss her) or even sit on the same piece of furniture with her (or be in the same room)... and what was worse, she wasn't allowed into the synagogue (to pray)... and because of this (she had become a loner, an 'outcast', and despised)...

Perhaps this is why the Bible tells us that she spent all of her money on doctors (who most likely promised her the world) – just as psychics, self-help books, motivational speakers, and life coaches – are known to do today... but it tells us that rather than solve her problems (her problems only grew worse) and her situation (more desperate) – not sure *where to turn*...

So, let me just stop for a moment and ask you a question: where do you put your faith in times of trouble?... where do you (honestly) put your trust when problems arise in your life?...

I met a woman a few weeks ago who told me that after her son died unexpectedly (she started to drink more heavily)... another woman once told me that after going through a terrible break up with a boyfriend (she turned to Netflix and ice cream)... and still a good friend of mine told me how his money troubles (led him to gamble)... and I don't think any of their stories are unusual – in fact, you've heard them all before - (with the only exception being *that all of those people that I just mentioned* - are Christians) ... and not one of them turned to Jesus in their time of struggle... and what's worse – not one of them had peace...

Where do you put your faith in times of trial?...

You know, it doesn't tell us this but I imagine that when *that unnamed woman in our story* first saw Jesus (she too was hesitant *to come to him*)... and maybe she feared she'd be turned away, rejected, or even ridiculed for hoping... maybe the feelings of unworthiness began to surface once again... or perhaps she was afraid of the consequences she might face (not only for touching a holy man – but touching him with unclean hands)...

But what I love about this woman – and I love about this story – is not that she had perfect faith in what Jesus could do... in fact, all she really does is touch a tassel that hung on the corner of his garment *in hopes of being healed by stealth* ... but it's her willingness to take a risk and trust in his message – (and to make contact with Jesus in her own time of trial) that helps her find true healing... a healing that could only come from the Great Physician... (the one who isn't afraid to be touched by unclean hands – but who's hands cleanse everything he touches (including the ugliness of a cross)... turning no one away...

And notice that in her healing Jesus (doesn't reject her imperfect faith) but when she comes to him (and pours out her heart to him) he calls her 'daughter' (which is the only time in the N.T. that Jesus ever used that word to describe one of his own) telling her "*your faith – your sincere faith in coming to me (and believing in what I can do) - has made you well*"... has made you whole... has made you mine...

And then says to her (what he wants to say to us) – he says, "*Go in peace*"...

You know, not long after I started serving that hospital on Long Island one of the nurses mentioned in passing that Linda Little went home to be with the Lord (early one morning – with her family and friends gathered around her bedside)... and to be honest with you – it was in some ways sad to see such a beautiful soul leave this earth... and I say that because her faith inspired... and the Light of God lived within her... in a strange way she gave us comfort (and reasons to believe in the power of God)...

But what I learned through Linda Little (and what I have learned through so many others along the way – even some of your own loved ones who have gone Home) is that not everyone who gets sick will be healed of their illness... not everyone will be cured of their cancer... or have their disease taken from them... not even those who have faith to move mountains...

But to leave this earth with the peace of Jesus Christ secure in your heart (is to have the greatest gift of all) and the cure to calm all fear... a gift that come only

4

come from the Lord... and a gift that He wants to give to you this morning (so that you too can have peace with God – peace with neighbor – and peace with self... which is the greatest healing of all...

Friends, Jesus says to all of us, "*Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*"... and the only way to find out if that's true (is to reach out your hand to him this morning) – not by brushing up against him as many did in the crowd, but with a sincere heart) so that he can touch you (with his love)...

May you be blessed to believe in what our Lord can do... May you reach out to Him today and know that you are loved... and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your heart and minds...

In Jesus' name we pray...

**Amen!**