

How many of you assemble those large picture puzzles, puzzles that come in the boxes with hundreds of pieces? You could spend hours trying to put them together. Raise your hand if you enjoy putting picture puzzles together. I see there are many of you.

I don't like picture puzzles. I don't like being limited by this overall shape of the puzzle or having to fit the pieces into only one spot.

Recently we were out to dinner with our friends John and Barbara Risken. They shared with us they had purchased a used picture puzzle for one of their grandchildren. They gave it to him, and soon discovered that several of the pieces were missing from the box. Sort of a cruel trick.

I have been thinking a lot about that. And I realize that often when we look at Scripture. There are missing pieces of the puzzle. They are not given to us easily; we must be patient and wait for the Holy Spirit to provide them; and she takes her time.

There is more. Last fall we stopped by Heidi and Ivy's, and Ivy was working on a large puzzle, and all the pieces were the same color, white. No surprise that caught my attention... (I have since learned that Ivy did not finish the puzzle and sent it to her daughter) What struck me was how this puzzle reminded me of filters, points of view, like white privilege. What if the puzzle was all black, or all poor, or fill in the blank...?

So, in reading Mark's Gospel, preparing for this sermon, I knew I was jumping into a puzzle.... thank you, Holy Spirit.

When Jesus had crossed in the boat away from the Gentiles, to the other side again, the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee, a large crowd was gathered, then one of the elders of the synagogue named Jairus came, fell to his feet, and pleaded with him "My daughter is at the point of death so that, coming, you might lay hands on her so that she might be saved and might live." And Jesus went with him.

Jairus is one of the few characters named in Mark. He is probably one of the lay elders of the synagogue. He was probably not overly wealthy but had considerable status within the community. In this Society influenced by issues of honor and shame, Jairus held a highly Envidable position. He's not a rabbi and is probably not the presiding elder. He was not a preacher. He didn't chair the Vestry meetings but was available if people wanted to gripe about the missing pews or lack of air conditioning.

And a large crowd was following him, pressing together on him. there is a woman issuing blood for twelve years, suffered much from many physicians, had exhausted her health insurance, and became much worse.

She heard had heard these stories of Jesus came up behind in the crowd and grabbed his garment. "If I might fasten even to his garment, I will be saved." immediately, the fountain of her blood was made dry, and she knew she had been healed from the plague that had haunted her for many years.

Jesus also recognized at once that healing power had come out of him, he turned to the crowd and asked, "Who fastened onto my clothes?" the woman was afraid and trembling and came to him and told him the truth; he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go into peace, and you are healed from your plague."

While he was speaking with her, messengers from the presiding elder of the synagogue came to Jairus and said your daughter is dead, don't trouble the teacher anymore. Jesus overheard and said to the presiding elder, do not fear. Only believe. They left for the home of Jairus, as they came into the house and saw a commotion, weeping and much wailing. He asked, why are you making a commotion? This child is not dead. She is sleeping. They laughed at him. Jesus threw them out of the house and took the child's father and mother and entered her room. He said to her little girl, rise up; immediately the 12-year-old girl got up and walked around, and they were astonished.

Puzzle piece number 1

Clearly the issue between the two women is one of class. One the daughter of an official of privilege, the other a destitute unclean woman who had suffered much. Purity laws probably would not had let this woman out into this crowd of likely poor people. When she touched Jesus, the laws state she would pass her uncleanness onto Jesus.... yet when she touched Jesus they both felt the healing taking place. It is important to Mark's story that Jesus immediately paused his conversation with Jairus, sought the source of his healing power, called this unnamed woman his daughter, shared his peace with her. Undoubtedly this is one more example of preferential treatment for the poor, outcast, and unclean. Her touch of the hem of his garment in faith, healed her bleeding. His words healed her community standing, and her soul. With Jesus, the bleeding that ravages humanity can be stopped as we press beyond what is to what should be. Do we more often ask for the healing touch of Jesus from a point of privilege or unwavering faith?

Puzzle piece number 2

The heart of this text is the boldness of faith in the bleeding woman and compassion of Jesus to be sensitive to the surge of God's power that went out of him. He takes time to stop his rush to the home of Jairus and converse with the woman who is unnamed in scripture. His message is clear -- that the unnamed woman is of no less importance than the ill daughter of a person of power. She is a perpetual reminder that the socially marginal have a conspicuous place in the realization the beloved community.

Puzzle Piece number 3

Mark states that at the moment this woman of faith touches Jesus she is healed. Unlike other healing stories in Mark this woman's illness was invisible; there was nothing in her healing that would have been obvious to those around her. For this reason, the social stigma of her illness would not have ended even though her bleeding stopped. Jesus however called her out from the crowd, by coming forward and telling the whole truth she was freed from her suffering and the stigma removed. Further, Jesus' statement 'Daughter your faith has healed you, go in peace' she was made whole in the community. Mark's understanding of Jesus as a complete healer, having the ability to bring an end to physical suffering but also able to restore people to the fullness of life. This reminds us of the challenge of Toxic charity, healing the wounds yet ignoring the relational restoration of those we assist to fullness of life.

Puzzle Piece Number 4

African Americans know firsthand the exclusion, marginalization, and systemic racism which result in disproportionate number to have limited equity and access to health care —they too are bleeding. If our current context were different, all of us would be able to live Holy American-dreamed abundant lives. The reign of God Mark suggests that when we ‘by any means possible’ take action by executing a radical, courageous, and bold move of faith we are empowered to find miracles in unexpected places. The audacious reign of God will not be deterred, so that the reign of heaven will come on earth.

Will we by any means necessary heal the planet, feed the hungry, eliminate the warehousing of undocumented peoples that we should have welcomed as strangers among us?

Puzzle piece number 5

Jesus did not spend his time isolated from the world, and neither should the church. When it is isolated, it should break free of its boundaries and provide care where people are physically, socially, economically, or spiritually afflicted. If the church is to be a care center it has other roles to fulfill. A **diagnostic** role to determine what God is calling us to do in this time, a **preventative** role, or perhaps a vaccination to prevent the malignant viruses of the world, xenophobia, heterosexism, racism, nationalism, tribalism. And finally, a **convalescent** role, a role assisting in overcoming traumas in our current times and our history, through storytelling, confession, forgiveness, reparation.

Puzzle Piece Number 6

We are coming out of a time of empty church buildings, which in some ways has exposed our hidden emptiness, and challenged us to a future where we could make a significant attempt to demonstrate to our neighborhoods a completely different face of the beloved community. Perhaps we have spent too much thought in converting the world to our point of view and less about converting ourselves. Perhaps in turning to the unnamed woman Jesus is showing us a radical change from a status quo of simply being Christian to a dynamic role of becoming Christian. Augustine wrote of two loves that dwell and battle in the human heart, the love of self that is closed to transcendence, and the love that gives of itself, and there finds God.

The missing piece.

This story challenges faith communities to claim a feminist view of scripture and a feminist liberation theology. Mark through this healing story uplifts women to fullness and wholeness rooted in the faith of this unnamed woman rooted in herself. Jesus challenges her, and all of us, to live in the way of Jesus, together with him healing power and social responsibility.

When Jesus had raised the girl from the dead, after restoring the unnamed woman to personal and social health he did not stop to teach, or pray, ...rather without hesitation he dismissed the crowd with clear directions to each of us.... give her something to eat.

In a little while we are going to honor our brother Don Hawkinson, who I have known for years and recently in a Justice meeting nicknamed him the ***agitator in chief***. Don, a faithful servant leader, has been relentless, and imagines the beloved community in detail, often like a small burr under the saddle. Throughout his years of ministry, with faith like the unnamed woman in this Gospel, he has spoken directly to many of us, prodding us to repair or build with others a home, provide financial support, convert church buildings into homeless shelters, give the hungry something to eat.

Consider the body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven that is on this table, recall a time where you reached out and offered food, shelter, guidance, agitation, or compassion. Liberation Theology challenges us to seek Christ among people on the fringes of society as well as those that have been marginalized or wounded within the church. Jesus passed through the door of the upper room that we had locked in fear of the others. He passed through the wall that we built to surround ourselves. He opened a space for the love in our heart that gives of itself.

Where are you called this day to give a brother or sister something to eat.

The Reverend Rex McKee

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