

Salvation: Therapy, Cure, and Health
Mark 3:9-10; 5:21-43
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On the night of December 15, 2016, I lay in the intensive care unit of Williamsport Regional Medical Center (WRMC), hooked up to a maze of tubes, medical devices, and machines, teetering between life and death.

A week earlier, in the wee hours of the morning of December 8, I had gone to the emergency department with pain radiating up both shoulders into my neck and head. After a number of tests, the medical staff diagnosed me with muscle spasms and sent me home. The next day, when my symptoms hadn't improved, I went to the local urgent care facility just blocks from our home. It didn't take long before I was in an ambulance headed back to the hospital, told that I was having a heart attack. By then, it was 40 hours in duration.

That's about the last thing I remember for the week that followed. What I was told later was that I had one stent inserted in the catheter lab. Then, I developed ventricular fibrillation and other heart arrhythmias which gravely complicated matters. I had several more heart attacks and was repeatedly shocked back into rhythm. I was hooked up to a machine that took blood from my veins and pumped it back into my arteries, bypassing the heart and thus allowing it to rest.

By December 15th, the medical staff at WRMC determined they were at the end of the resources they could offer me. So in situations like that, the question becomes, "What do you do now?" Where do you go when you seemingly have no other options?

In the Gospel accounts, we have a number of stories where people in the first century faced this kind of dilemma. The Gospel of Mark in particular introduces Jesus as a person who was able to heal people that no one thought could be healed. So people started coming from near and far. In Mark 3:9-10, we read that *[Jesus] told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him.*

Two chapters later, in a passage from Mark 5, we find two prime examples of this kind of desperation in a story within a story. In the first story, we have a synagogue leader with a critically ill daughter. Jairus came up to Jesus, fell at his feet, and 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."* Mark 5:22-23 (NRSV) The inner story is of an anonymous woman with a bleeding condition. Even though she was not supposed to be out in public with her condition, she made her way through the crowd to simply touch Jesus' clothing in her desperate attempt to be healed.

So what is it that people are seeking in this desperate quest for healing? Is it the same thing I was seeking in the occasional moments on the night of December 15, 2016 when I came out of sedation enough to know what was happening? Is it the same thing that the medical team in Williamsport was seeking for me as their patient when they decided to call in the MedEvac helicopter and fly me to Presbyterian Hospital at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC)?

In the Gospel of Mark, there are four specific words in the original Greek language in which the Gospels were written that are sometimes translated into English Bibles with some form of the word “heal.” Exploring the underlying meaning of those words in the context of the Gospel stories and my own story has helped to give me a fuller understanding of the meaning of healing in the ministry of Jesus. And that understanding has profound implications for how the church as well as individual Christians carry out God’s ministry of healing in our world today.

Therapy. When Mark 3:10 says that Jesus *had cured (healed) many*, we have the Greek word *therapeuô* from which we get our word English word “therapy.” In today’s healthcare systems, “therapy” refers to “treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder.” So the leader’s daughter had a “disorder”; she was sick and dying. The woman had a “bleeding disorder” which made her unclean. I had a heart disorder which led to heart damage and irregular, life threatening rhythms.

Thus, treatment was applied to relieve or heal the disorder. Looking back, there were some amazing therapies that have enabled me to be restored to the level of health I enjoy today.

-) The heart catheterization lab became a place of therapy, and the most notable objects of that therapy were the stents that opened up the blood vessels in my heart so that the blood could flow through them.
-) There was that high tech ECMO machine which allowed my heart time to “rest.”
-) There were medication therapies, nursing treatments, respiratory therapies, and later, the long needles inserted into my back to draw out hundreds of milliliters of fluid from around my lungs.

When I was well enough to return to Williamsport for rehab, there was more therapy:

-) **Physical therapy** to regain strength in bed-ridden muscles.
-) **Occupational therapy** to do such mundane things as dress myself.
-) **Psychological therapy** to ascertain if my brain was still functioning as before.
-) **Speech therapy** to counter the effects of a breathing tube down my throat.
-) And more **respiratory therapy** to counteract the toxic effects to my lungs of a drug that was supposed to treat my heart arrhythmias.

Today, we would probably distinguish between the treatment or therapy and its intended effect of healing. However, Mark 3:10 says that Jesus had *cured (or healed or literally applied therapy to)* many. What is at the root of that word?

According to some scholars,¹ the root concept of the Greek word *therapeuô* is “to serve.” Thus, to provide therapy is to serve in the process of healing. To be a therapist is to give one’s time, talents, energies, and skills in service for the healing of another. It is to give a piece of one’s own life for the life of another.

So when Mark says that Jesus *healed (or “therapied”)* many, he was writing about Jesus giving his life for the healing of others. Jesus served in a therapeutic ministry so that others might be healed and live. Jesus gave his life for the life of the world. And, as followers of Jesus, we are also called to give our lives in healing service to a broken and hurting world.

I can’t begin to count the number of “therapists” or “servants of healing” who gave of themselves so that I could be restored health and home and family and work. To be a Christian, especially a healthcare worker, is to realize that we do as Jesus did, carrying out the role of a

therapist, a life-giving servant to those whom we treat. So “therapy” or “service” is our first healing word.

Cure. We find the second of these healing words in Mark 5 in connection with what happened to the woman with the condition of bleeding. When she touched the clothes of Jesus, Mark says that *she felt in her body that she was **healed** of her disease...* Other versions translate *healed of her affliction* (NASB) or even *freed from her suffering* (NIV).

Here the Greek work [*iaomai*] means to cure or restore, to bring freedom from the suffering of the disease or condition. In English we sometimes talk about someone being restored to health. So this woman was freed of her chronic disease, cured, healed, restored to health.

Yet this meaning of healing has more implications than just restoring to physical health. Because of the Old Testament purity laws surrounding a woman’s menstruation, a condition of chronic bleeding meant that she was continually impure. This would make anyone who was in contact with her impure. She would be unwelcome in public. Her family would keep their distance. She would have been essentially an outcast in her own community.

Thus, to restore this woman to health was not just a cure in the physical sense of stopping or “drying up” her bleeding. By touching the hem of Jesus’s cloak, she could again be “in touch” with family and friends. She was restored to her community.

By being restored to community, she would have also experienced an emotional and spiritual restoration. She no longer needed to be troubled about why she had to suffer such a condition and be ostracized by her community. She no longer was prevented from going to the temple to worship God. Her healing was a complete cure of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. She was indeed restored to the fullness of health.

It is impossible for me to fully assess or express the healing effects of being a part of a loving Christian community across North America and around the world.

-) Having my wife, Twila, by my side in Pittsburgh and knowing of the many persons who made her presence possible was to be in touch with my community.
-) Seeing family members and friends who traveled many miles out of their way to be in touch when I could hardly even speak was priceless.
-) To come back to Williamsport for rehab, even though it had only been my hometown for less than a month when I flew away, was to be restored to my community.
-) To come back home after rehab, to a house I had barely moved into, was to be restored to my community.
-) To worship at Agape Fellowship, even though I could just barely call it “my church” was nevertheless an emotional experience.
-) And, as the summer progressed, to be present in Goshen, at my former church, at the Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship Annual Gathering 2017 at Laurelville, and reunited with my sister who made countless phone calls on my behalf from California and Illinois...well, it was simply amazing.
-) And then, I went back and read the emails about me and realized the impact of many prayers. Those were the prayers of a community, part of God’s healing, restoring work.

To be cured, to be healed, is to be restored to the relationships that mean the most, the relationships at the core of our life in Christ.

Health. This sense of complete healing is conveyed through yet a third word in which Jesus affirms this woman's healing. It comes at the end of Mark 5:34 when Jesus says, "...*go in peace, and be healed of your disease.*"

Here, word used is Greek word [*hugiês*] from which we get English word "hygiene." The word carries the implications of complete health and wholeness.

For many people today, hygiene carries the implications of cleanliness and sanitation. Yet its dictionary definition is much broader. Hygiene is defined as "a science of the establishment and maintenance of health" and the second definition is "conditions or practices conducive to health."²

Certainly, sanitation and cleanliness are key factors in promoting and preserving health. That's a big part of the underlying reason for purity laws in the Old Testament. But good hygiene is more than an obsessive-compulsive desire to be clean. Hygiene is much more than just the absence of disease. Hygiene also involves eating right, exercising appropriately, avoiding harmful substances, and promoting healthy relationships with others and with God.

To consider carefully the full implications of hygiene, we need to realize that my hygiene and health is also bound up with your hygiene and health.

-) If the water in our community is contaminated, none of us will have good hygiene.
-) If the food that we buy has a residue of chemical pesticides that are not easily washed away, then anyone who eats that food has the potential to become ill.
-) If the air that we breathe is filled with pollutants, the health of all who breathe that air is affected.

So this particular word for healing is about the total, overall health of the whole person in the whole community. This is reinforced when Jesus says, "...*go in peace, and be healed of your disease.*" The word for peace here is the word that is used to translate the Old Testament Hebrew word, "shalom."

In the Bible, peace or shalom is never just about the absence of conflict. When Jews greeted each other or said good-bye to each other saying, "Shalom," they weren't saying, "I hope you don't get into any conflicts with your family or friends." They were wishing each other a total sense of well-being: good physical health, an emotional sense of well-being, healthy relationships, and, most of all, God's blessing.

Shalom, in its fullness, is a wholeness and well-being of human life in community as God originally intended it—freedom from sin, sickness, disease, conflict, and all of suffering and consequences that go with that human condition. We too participate in healing ministry as we seek the shalom and the hygiene or health of not only ourselves, but of all persons in the community.

Before my cancer in 2014 and my heart attack in 2016, I thought of myself as a healthy person, striving to live a healthy lifestyle. I walked or biked the eight blocks to work whenever possible. In the winter, my exercise was shoveling snow by hand. Starting about ten years ago, I made a conscious effort to bring down my cholesterol and lose weight by modifying my diet. I was proud of the fact that I brought my cholesterol way down without using statin drugs. I thought I was dealing appropriately with the stress in my life.

So neither I nor the physician assistant who treated me in the emergency room thought I fit the profile for being at risk of a heart attack. Yet it happened. Whether it was hereditary or too many hamburgers over the years or internalizing more stress than I realized, or some other combination of factors is not clear. Yet, as a white middle-class North American male, I did not defy the statistics. The diseases of my country and class and kin and gender were now my diseases.

I now need to take further steps that include diet and exercise and the addition of regular prescription medications. And speaking of medications, I now have plenty of first-hand experience with how treating one set of life-threatening symptoms with certain medications can bring life-threatening side effects in another area. A disruption in the hygiene and health and shalom has implications that cannot be magically fixed by a pill.

Although I came home from rehab in mid-January 2017, I still spent most of January and February in the hospital. A medication to treat my heart arrhythmias was toxic to my lungs. A blood thinner caused excessive bleeding. And when in the summer following, several weeks after two doctors wondered why they hadn't put me on statins and thus "remedied" that oversight, I landed in the hospital again for symptoms that seemed traceable only to the statins.

I am only a tiny microcosm of how we as human beings have disturbed and disrupted and destroyed the environment of shalom in which God intended us to live. We are collectively responsible for the toxicity and hunger and disease that disproportionately affect those who are already sick and poor and needy. Our world is far from good hygiene and shalom.

Yet that is at the heart of Jesus' ministry of health and wholeness when he says, "go in peace, and be healed [*hygi s*] of your disease."

Three words: **Therapy, Cure, and Health.** Yet even those three words need at least one final word.

Salvation. This is a word also used several times in this passage as well as extensively throughout the New Testament. It is a word that gathers together all of the meanings of the other words we have looked at. It is a word for healing that has been used and misused in the history of the church.

[15] We see it first in the outer story in Mark 5. Jairus, the leader of the synagogue begs Jesus, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be [saved] made well [*s z*], and live." And the woman with the bleeding said in Mark 5:28, "*If I but touch his clothes, I will be [saved].*" And in Mark 5:34, before Jesus says, "... go in peace, and be healed of your disease," he first says, "*Daughter, your faith has saved you.*"

However, you won't find that translation in many of our Bibles. Rather, it says, "*Daughter, your faith has made you well*" or "...*your faith has healed you*." But the word *σωζω* in the Greek is most often translated into English as some form of "save" or "salvation." The word is the same one used in Acts 16:31 where the apostle Paul tells the Philippian jailer, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.* (NRSV) And back in Mark 8:35, Jesus says, ³⁵ *For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.*

The different translations reflect the fact that in the English language, we have tried to make distinctions between physical health and spiritual salvation. We have lost the connection between peace and wholeness, health and salvation.

But the healing stories in the Gospels show Jesus as one who saves from all human conditions of sin, suffering, sickness, disease, climate change and environmental poisoning, conflict and war—anything that destroys or disrupts the shalom in which God intended us to live. Thus, Jairus pleads for his daughter, (5:23) *Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well [be saved] and live.*" The woman with the bleeding condition says to herself, (5:28) "*If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well [saved].*" And then, in v. 34, Jesus says, "*Daughter, **your faith** has made you well [saved you].*"

It is that same **faith** that Jesus calls forth from *the leader of the synagogue* [Jairus], when he says, "*Do not fear, only believe.*" It is a faith that seems laughably ridiculous to the worldly mourners gathered around the lifeless body of his daughter. But Jesus' pronouncement that "...*the child is not dead but sleeping*" is but an invitation to all of us to get a foretaste, a glimpse into the power of the resurrection through a saving, healing ministry and movement of God that breaks into our present situation.

On the night of December 15-16, 2016, I drifted in and out of sedation. I remember only these three things:

1. I was somehow aware that I was being flown by helicopter to Pittsburgh.
2. I felt multiple shocks as the medical team tried to get my heart back in rhythm.
3. And I remember praying "*My times are in your hand...*" I also associated that phrase with another, "*Into your hand I commit my spirit.*"

Some months later, I knew I needed to find out for sure where those phrases came from. I found them both in Psalm 31:

-) ⁵*Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.*
-) ¹⁵*My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.*
- ¹⁶*Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.*

And then there is the rest of Psalm 31 whose overall theme can probably be summarized in the last half of v. 2: *Be a rock of refuge for me, / a strong fortress to save me.*

Three words, **Therapy, Cure, and Health**, speak primarily to a present reality as Jesus touches lives in the present moment in ways that, at the same time, offer a glimpse into the restoration of

God's ideal future. Yet the word "save" or "salvation" in the New Testament speaks of a reality that spans past, present, **and future** that we can enter into now by faith. Truly, as we experience the touch of Jesus, even just the hem of his garment, we dwell in the hands of a loving Creator God who desires health and wholeness, peace and salvation, for us all.

So in these extra days that I have been given, I am often reminded to breathe that prayer: "*My times are in your hand...*" I do so in the knowledge that my Lord, the great Healer himself, uttered his final words from Psalm 31. Luke puts it this way: ⁴⁶ *Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."* Having said this, he breathed his last. Luke 23:46 (NRSV)

Whether I continue to live in this world or die physically, I do so knowing that I am in God's hands. The assurance of salvation that has brought me a temporary healing is but a foretaste of the reality of the fullness of health and wholeness awaiting me in resurrection glory.

We considered a number of words for health used in these brief passages about Jesus' healing ministry but used even further in the rest of the Bible and in the life of the church today as we continue the healing work of Jesus. **Salvation: Therapy, Cure, and Health.** Here, we get a glimpse of the meaning of "healing" for our own lives and for our ministry as disciples of Jesus. All the healing words encompass a meaning that goes beyond our comprehension. Yet, we get a glimpse. All of the stories of healing from the Old Testament to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' healing ministry to our own "Stories of Healing" today, point us to the power of God to bring about a final and complete healing and wholeness in the end. It is this full and final and all-encompassing healing that we accept by faith.

We have seen the multi-faceted meaning of healing in the Gospel stories, the stories of Jesus at work in both the first century and the twenty-first.

-) **Healing is therapy and service:** Jesus' presence among the crowds of this world to give his life to bring healing and hope to others.
-) **Healing is cure and restoration** as people are restored to health of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.
-) **Healing is hygiene and wholeness,** a public health that seeks the shalom of each individual and the whole community.
-) And finally, there is **healing as salvation.**

In the final analysis, we too are called, in the midst of our desperate situations to heed Jesus' word to Jairus: "*Do not fear, only believe.*" We can commit our future into the hands of God. God's resurrection power demonstrated in Jesus, will heal, will save.

¹ New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible

² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hygiene>