

**The Touch of Healing**  
Genesis 12:1-9; Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26  
June 8, 2008  
Rev. Dr. Rick Russell



**Matt 9:9-13, 18-26**

*As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.*

*And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax-collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'. For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."*

*While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.*



There is a movie out now called "The Visitor." The protagonist is Walter Vale, an academic who has retired from life after his wife's death. A political economist at a small Connecticut college, Walter (played by Richard Jenkins) is no longer engaged with his students. He's taken a reduced teaching load ostensibly to complete a book, but he's not writing one. He makes a half-hearted effort at taking piano lessons—an attempt to stay close to the spirit of his wife, a pianist and teacher—but he finds something to object to in each of the teachers he hires: none can match his image of the woman he lost. He has given up on a productive life and is going through the motions of living. When he travels to New York City, after a long absence, he discovers two immigrants have moved into his apartment, having rented it from a con artist. By interacting with

these two he finds a way back to living, he finds his *raison d'être*. The movie has many themes, social and personal, but it is also about the healing touch.

Today's gospel lesson is crowded, jam-packed, and full to the brim with images of the powerful workings of God whom we see in Jesus Christ. Matthew, the tax collector is sitting at his tax booth and Jesus calls him to follow and become a disciple. Wow! Why is that a wow? It is a wow because tax collectors are the scum of the earth in Jewish society. They have sold their souls to the Roman occupiers and collect the Roman taxes that keep the people in poverty and bondage.

Next up: Jesus is having supper with the tax collectors and other sinners. Wow! Why is that a wow? It is a wow because table fellowship was a religious occasion, an expression of devotion to family and honoring God. When a religious teacher shared a meal, the company was acceptable in the eyes of God.

Next up: the healing of a woman who had bleeding for 12 years, and the raising to life of a girl who had died. Wow! Wow! Wow!

It is easy for us to become underwhelmed when hearing the stories of the gospel. It is easy for us to put up our rational filters and say to ourselves: "that is ridiculous!" Or "I can't believe that" or "I have no idea what to make of these stories, so I won't think about it." I understand that. It is unreal. It is long ago and far away. It is about a time and a place that has little connection to our time and place.

It is supposed to be the pastor's job to make sense of these long ago and far away stories by bringing them close and making them contemporary. How shall I do this? Shall I say to you: It is in the Bible so we have to believe it? Shall I say to you: If you have enough "faith" you, too, can be healed? No. That is not my calling. I am called to remind you of who God is for us and what God intends for us. In the light of that calling, I announce that God is here; that God recognizes our brokenness; that God is available for healing in our mind, body, spirit, and soul, in our relationships, our culture, and our world.

It is also my calling to ask questions and to invite you to consider these questions. Here is one I like: What does healing look like to you? Here is another: What kind of healing do you believe God wants for you in your life? Here is another: How do we limit God or stand in God's way of healing us and the world?

I like these questions because they move us out of a place where we are asked to suspend our logical and rational thinking as to whether Jesus really brought that girl to life, to a place where we may put our energies to work and our attention directed on the broken places in our lives and in our world.

Do we really trust that God can heal us? I hope so. Let us say, yes. Yes, we trust. Yes, we have "faith." Yes, we believe that God can heal us. Now, what are we called to do to help God?

Trust in God that the gifts God has given us are sufficient for the work we need.  
Acknowledge that healing takes time.  
Give the credit and the judgment to God  
Step out in faith.

The words for healing in the Scriptures are similar to the words for wholeness, for restoration, and for salvation. We are being saved right now. We are being called to repentance, to turn away from paths of destruction and harm toward paths of reconciliation and healing. The community God intends, the royal banquet where all are welcome, is a place of healing. The healing touch is available to all. We receive it daily. We are able to render it daily. That is what God does. That is what God wants us to do.

Amen.