

Ephesians 3:14-21

3:14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

3:15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

3:16 I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with **power** through his Spirit,

3:17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

3:18 I pray that you may have **the power** to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

3:19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

3:20 Now to him who by the **power** at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,

3:21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Mark 5:21-43

5:21 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea.

5:22 Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet

5:23 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."

5:24 So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.

5:25 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.

5:26 She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.

5:27 She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,

5:28 for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

5:29 Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

5:30 Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

5:31 And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'"

5:32 He looked all around to see who had done it.

5:33 But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

5:34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

5:35 While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?"

5:36 But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "**Do not fear, only believe.**"

5:37 He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.

5:38 When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

5:39 When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."

5:40 And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was.

5:41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!"

5:42 And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.

5:43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Proclamation of the Word

Last Wednesday we were stunned to learn that a shooter would enter a Sanctuary of peace and kill nine precious people. In our collective horror and grief, some of us grasped at what we might do. As happens in the face of a tragedy, there was a lot of chaos. As the story unfolded, we learned who these church members and pastors were the salt and light of their communities, our State, their homes. How could this be? Who would do such a thing? How can this happen in God's house?

Good people have spoken and said we must not allow this. The families of faith stood and faced the perpetrator and offered forgiveness, grace, and called upon him to repent. Thousands joined hands and built a bridge of love across Charleston. In the same way in our hometown, people drove across town to worship together at Abel Baptist church- Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Unitarians, Methodists and Baptists, and maybe even some who have lost their faith, gathered together to pray, building bridges, reaching out a hand, offering a healing balm, a listening ear, an open heart.

Would such an event bring out the best of us or the worst?

Most, in the example of the families and example of those murdered, have refused to stoop to hate and violence, and in return have offered grace. The last 10 days have been chaotic, emotional, surprising, and filled with healing of all things.

The crowded streets of Charleston are not unlike the great crowd gathered by the sea that day around Jesus. The events in our passage remind me of the disorientation, soul searching, and clamor of the last week and a half. The Greek word for "great" is everywhere. There is a great crowd, Jairus begged greatly, the woman suffered greatly under a great number of physicians, there is great weeping and wailing. It is too much, overwhelming, an exhausting scene. The Presbyterian in me wants a little more order, less chaos. I want Jesus at the helm of the boat to yell at the storm, "Peace, be still."

Jesus, the bridge builder, had just sailed back across to the Jewish side after visiting the Gentile side of the sea of Galilee. Jesus, you see was a bridge builder, between peoples, linking them to the Source of all life, God Almighty. The people had heard of his healing powers and his authority even over the wind and the waves. They were in need. One man, Jairus, desperate for help for his daughter came to beseech Jesus to come heal her. Normally, as a leader in the local synagogue, a man of status and privilege, who would have sent an emissary, but not today. He was anxious, distraught. His daughter was dying. He knew Jesus could help. In the same way another, the hemorrhaging woman desperate for help, slipped into the crowd, and reached out her hand at a shot to find healing and restoration.

Two people of different statuses, class, or station. One poor, spent all she had. One wealthy enough to hire professional mourners for his daughters. One male. One female. Both needy. Both come to Jesus for help. Separate, but equal in their despair. Both, by the amazing grace of God are healed. One already holds the status of daughter because of position. The other is given that name by Jesus himself, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Both daughters are important, but let's focus for a moment on the hemorrhaging woman for it is the larger story sandwiched in between Jairus' quest for help. I am struck by her audacity. She had been invisible, cast out of polite company. She was ill physically, broke financially, and probably spent spiritually. She was used to surviving by now. And she is desperate. She will do anything. So she reaches for his robe.

She is healed and immediately Jesus feels the power go out of him. He stops dead in his tracks from his important errand to get to Jairus' house. The power went out of him. He felt it. A change had occurred. He turns and sees her, for real, sees her. She is no longer invisible. And she tells him the whole truth. In fact the Greek is translated, "She tells Jesus all the truth." And Jesus hears her. He calls her "Daughter" and she is made whole, no longer a half-dead person whose life blood has drained her of her social contacts, her money, and her strength. She is a whole person once again.

In some ways, I think that is what has happened to many of us in the swirl of the last week and a half. We are at attention. We have been stopped in our tracks and must turn and see what is tugging at us, refusing to be ignored. We have seen how hatred can fester in sick ways in our culture and bring very devastating consequences. I understand there are lots of important conversations of guns, flags, mental health, abusive homes, but the sons and daughters of Emmanuel AME have reminded us that

we cannot refuse to close our eyes to our desperate need to ask Jesus for help for our society's sickness of racism. We need healing, and the people who were wronged are teaching us how to heal-offering grace, love, and forgiveness, not because they are just good people, but because they know Jesus. God is their life-line, their hope, their strength.

In a very emotional speech, Senator Tim Scott spoke on the floor of the US Senate on Tuesday. Before speaking he saw Daniel Simmons, Jr. whose father, a pastor and Vietnam Veteran, was gunned down last Wednesday. Sen. Scott asked him if there is anything he wished him to share on the floor of the Senate. Daniel responded, "Please share that God cares for his people. God still lives." Scott spoke, I was amazed, then he shared with a sense of great enthusiasm and energy- a sense of excitement that this evil attack would lead to reconciliation, restoration, and unity in our nation." The nation has taken notice of such bold faith, such audacious witness.

We can begin the healing by being honest and like the hemorrhaging woman made whole start by telling all the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And listening like Jesus did. We will see the power of God at work in this. More than we ask or imagine, the power of the Holy Spirit moves in the hearts of God's people. We have seen the people of faith rise up. Paul prays for God's people praying, " that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

Both passages today discuss power. The power of God to heal. The power to comprehend. The power of the Holy Spirit. God's power at work within his people. And I am struck at the example of Jesus from whom the "power went forth" so that the woman might be healed. Sometimes like Jesus, those in power must let go, yield power, so that others might be lifted up.

William Sloan Coffin writes, "Hatred ...is a diminishing emotion. It makes us inmates in prison houses of our own spirits." And he reminds us that while we all have prejudices, racism is "prejudice plus power."ⁱ For those who have the upper hand, the power, racism can be a tool of great harm even terror. We can begin, by being honest, telling all the truth. Those in power, opening hearts and ears to hear the voices long silenced.

In the 1990s we worshiped at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Tucker, GA. Once a privileged, white suburb, the neighborhood was changing, as white flight continues. I learned in a study group on racism that once a neighborhood hits the 10% minority threshold, the whites start moving out. It has happened all over the city. Some of our white neighbors in Atlanta now live in Watkinsville, which is almost Athens, GA. When asked why they said, "the neighborhood has gone downhill." which was code for more minorities.

A few members of our church had been greatly impacted by Apartheid in S. Africa. In fact, the daughter of the Moderator of the S. African Presbyterian church, Tsepo Msange, lived with one of our families down the street from the governor of Georgia while she received her high school education. She was in our youth group. These members decided they must do something about racism in our own backyard, not just across the globe. Our church in Tucker formed a relationship with an African-American church to deal with racism. We had potlucks and pulpit swaps. Some of us met in groups to discuss honestly, without defensiveness, the issues each of us dealt with. As a young Seminarian, I introduced myself to the group the first time, saying, "I am Laura. I grew up a racist." to which one of my black sisters in Christ speaking the truth in love said you cannot escape it, racism is built into all we do. Eventually, I understood. Racism was not just in the past. I amended my statement saying, "I am Laura. I am a racist." For like Alcoholics Anonymous has taught us, we can enter recovery, but we cannot escape our illness. Racism is the illness and inheritance we have received.

Growing up in small town SC, racism was subtly and not so subtly woven into the fabric of life. We use shame and humor sometimes. I heard racist jokes at the dinner table, sometimes right on the heels of a prayer. My first memory of awareness of racism was in first grade when I exchanged phone numbers with my new friend Yvette. Yvette was black. We would call each other at home. After a few times of Yvette calling me I got the message, "Is that your little N-friend calling again?" I saw the sneers and looks exchanged among my family members. Shame was used to teach me racism. I knew my older brothers were going to High School where students were being locked in the gym surrounded by SWAT teams in riot gear for racial conflicts as three high schools were being consolidated into one, York Comprehensive High. They were learning to live a new reality. They were scared. I understand. We are all caught in the web of racism. It is a spiritual disease for all parties.

What is your first memory of racism?

As I grew, I learned the stories of my family of heroic public servants, soldiers, churchmen. As I got older I learned some owned slaves, some fought to keep them, and in the many years after the Civil War, the Smiths were leaders not only in the community and church, but secretly members of the KKK working to maintain a system that privileged us white folks. I remember questioning all that beginning with my friend Yvette. I cannot reconcile such hate with my Christian faith. I continue to work to repent of America's original sin, my own sin, and build bridges of healing. I am a recovering racist. I have a long way to go. I want to be healed of this disease. I want God's people to be healed.

Last weekend our family was able to go out on the lake in our boat. It was the first time out this summer. Hallie jumped on the tube, but the rope that linked the tube and the boat was a huge mess of knots. I stood on the boat deck and unraveled that knotted up rope for what felt like forever. I think if we are to heal from racism, it will be like working out the knots in that rope- trial and error, patience, when one tactic doesn't get us anywhere, we have to try another way. And we most

definitely need Jesus to help us heal when brothers and sisters in Christ are half-dead with hate, or worse shot dead because of skin color.

What I do know is like Mr. Simmons said, "God is with his people. God still lives." Jesus has the power to heal, to restore, to unify, to redeem this awful tragedy. We must reach out. It is when those with power allow the power to go out, to share it, to sit face to face in honest, respectful, loving dialogue that it happens. Hate may be part of our heritage. May God's love be our legacy.

Both daughters in today's passage received healing and restored relationships. Jairus was a man of position and power who had a desperate need which Jesus heard and to which Jesus responded. All three received a healing. But Jesus was not too busy to stop along the way and heal the woman who had to push her way through a great crowd with great courage to reach for what she so needed, the power of Jesus flowing in her to restore her and make her whole. It even changed Jesus, for the power went out from him, and he noticed. He turned not to scold her, but to listen to her tell all the truth, and then he blessed her by saying, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."

May we all, sons and daughters, reach out for Jesus and allow him to bring healing and peace by the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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ⁱ William Sloane Coffin, *A Passion for the Possible; a Message to U.S. Churches*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 53.