

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. *Amen.*

Barry Robinson tells the story of a Zen master who was invited to a great Catholic monastery to instruct the monks who resided there in the practice of Zen. The holy man exhorted the monks to meditate constantly and to try to solve their Zen mystery with great energy and zeal. He told them that if they practiced with full-hearted effort, true understanding would come to them. “But, you really must put your hearts into it,” he stressed.

All of the monks listened attentively and smiled politely. Finally, one old monk raised his hand and said, “Master, our way of prayer is a little different than yours. We have been meditating and praying in the simplest fashion without effort; for we believe that a person must wait, instead, to be illumined by the grace of God. Isn’t there anything in Zen about this illumination that comes from doing nothing, that comes to a person uninvited?”

The Zen master, when he heard this, laughed out loud and said, “My dear fellow, the reason we Buddhists put so much effort into prayer is because we believe God has already done enough.”

Unlike those monks who meditated and prayed in the simplest fashion, believing a person must wait to be illumined by the grace of God, the characters in today’s Gospel passage from Mark made great personal effort to take advantage of what God was already offering through our Lord Jesus Christ: that is, restoration to the fullness of life through healing. Each of them was in desperate personal circumstances; but they were also convicted by their faith and belief that Jesus could help them, and because they were convicted by their faith, nothing would prevent them from seeking his help.

The first story we hear today tells us about Jairus, leader or patron of the synagogue in Galilee. His position tells us that he is a wealthy and powerful man, but neither his money nor his power can save his daughter. So he prevails upon Jesus’ good will to come to his home and lay hands upon the little girl. As we read later in the passage, not everyone in his group believes in Jesus’ power, so Jairus is putting himself and his reputation on the line simply by asking for Jesus’ help. But the risk is worth it because the little girl is healed and lives despite the appearance that she was already dead by the time Jesus reached her.

It’s interesting to find another healing story right in the middle of this story about Jairus and his daughter. The story of the woman who has been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years, who has “endured much under many physicians” and has spent all she has but is no better, not only interrupts the story of the healing of Jairus’ daughter, but also interrupts the telling of that story. The contrast between these two situations is noteworthy, just as the woman’s approach to Jesus is noteworthy by its very difference. This woman was convinced that she only needed to touch his cloak to be healed. And so she was.

We could easily spend our time this morning examining the differences between these two people, particularly the so-called power and influence each did or did not bring to their interaction with Jesus. We might speculate about whether or not one’s faith was stronger than the other. We might even wonder which of them was most changed by the miracle of our Lord’s healing. But that would be pointless; because we know that our Living God sees each of us equally. So instead I call you back to the story of the Zen master and the monks. Remember, the monks prayed simply and waited for God’s grace to come upon them. The Zen master believed that through constant meditation and zeal and energy, true understanding would come. What would have happened to

Jairus' daughter or to the suffering woman if either had prayed simply and simply waited? What happens when that is what *we* do? Does God always want us to sit and wait?

The late Madeleine L'Engle, author of young adult fiction and a devout Episcopal lay woman, wrote that "Sometimes the very walls of our churches separate us from God and each other. In our various naves and sanctuaries we are safely separated from those outside, from other denominations, other religions, separated from the poor, the ugly, the dying..." She continues, "The house of God is not a safe place. It is a cross where time and eternity meet, and where we are—or should be—challenged to live more vulnerably, more interdependently." That is, of course, how both the powerful leader of the synagogue *and* the woman who had no power each found healing.

In the aftermath of the tragedy in Charleston almost two weeks ago, I've been watching—as many of you have—the ways that community has responded to the terrible event that brought great sadness to them and to our country. The words that come to mind as I think of their response are "gracefully" and "graciously." And, using Madeleine L'Engle's words, I would add that their response has also shown their vulnerability and interdependence. It is a rare occasion in our times to see forgiveness offered so freely, so joyfully. They know, it seems, that forgiveness is often the key to healing. Through their attitudes and actions, the people of Charleston are making it easier for both healing and change to take place. What an example they have set for the rest of us; giving *us* an opportunity to examine our own truths, to both forgive and ask for forgiveness; and to live more vulnerably, more interdependently with each other and also with those who are not like us. As the author of the Wisdom of Solomon writes, "God did not make death. And he does not delight in the death of the living." But perhaps God finds delight when wounded hearts embrace God's Kingdom and live by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so God's healing will come to them through their own actions.

Today as on the fourth Sunday of every month at St. Francis, everyone is invited to come forward for the laying on of hands and anointing with oil for healing. The invitation reminds us that Jesus sent the disciples to continue his work of healing—in his name—as a witness to the marvelous power and presence of God. Regardless of the nature of our affliction, it is through God's healing that we not only become whole, but that we may fully and completely experience Christ's unfailing love for us. There are few of us—perhaps *none* of us—who have never had need of healing. There are more of us—perhaps *most* of us—who have not been willing to let ourselves be exposed and vulnerable by expressing our need of healing.

"If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." The suffering woman knew that Jesus' healing power was freely given—for everyone. May we likewise seek God's healing when we are afflicted, and just as openly accept it and acknowledge that it comes to us through the fullness of God's grace. And when we do, we must really put our hearts into it. After all, God has done enough. Amen.