

Sermon by Madeline Weiser
Youth Sunday 2021

Are we healed by others or are we healed by God and our desire to get better? Sometimes it can feel like others are trying to fix us rather than guiding us on our path to healing. This often sends a bad message to those who are suffering that says, “I see you as broken,” or “I can fix you; let me fix you.” This is a hidden theme that I believe our Gospel captures very well. If we look deeper into today’s passage from the Bible, we see both a woman and a young girl who are considered broken in the eyes of society. The woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages was seen as broken and dirty by society because, according to Mosaic law, if you touch an unclean person then you yourself will also become unclean. Similarly, Jairus’ daughter, who was pronounced dead by the time Jesus had gotten to her, should certainly have been declared impure. However, twice in this passage, Jesus proved that, despite what others see, we are never broken or fully defeated in His eyes because He sees US, and not what others define or label us as. Jesus never told the woman who suffered from hemorrhages that it was wrong of her to touch Him because it now made him “impure” or because it was against all rules for her to do so, but instead Jesus told the woman: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.” By telling her this in front of the crowd, Jesus is telling everyone that this woman, despite her gender and health status, and need for healing, was still very much worthy of respect. Similarly, rather than fearing the social and religious consequences of handling a dead body, Jesus helped the people who believed the little girl had died to realize that she was in fact only sleeping by telling her “Talitha cum,” which translates to “Little girl, get up!” To him, this woman in need of healing was not a “problem” or an “inconvenience,” but a sacred individual worthy of flourishing.

Almost two thousand years later, this story is incredibly applicable, because, just like the townspeople in this story, we too have a hard time seeing others who are trying to heal as not innately broken. Some of us take away other’s dignity because we don’t trust that a suffering person could ever find the strength to get better on their own. Others unknowingly take away the worth of others because it is our human nature that wants to be able to fix broken things for our own comfort! This can cause us to try to fix *people* when they are not ready to be healed, and in doing so, we may be doubting God’s power to work outside of us and through that person’s own strength, worth, and faith.

I have experienced being on both of these sides of society- taking my desire to help too far and trying to fix those I saw as broken, and ALSO feeling belittled from fixers myself. For instance, let me tell you about a friend of mine that, for the sake of confidentiality, I will call Dove. Dove came to me because she was struggling with family issues. Being the young and naive 9th grader that I was, I thought that I could fix Dove by finding the root of their problems and giving them advice on what I thought they could do to get rid of their struggle. This sounds really good, doesn’t it? What an amazing friend and person I must have been to fix this broken person who could not help themselves. Shockingly, I was not being an amazing friend. If I was trying to be a good friend to Dove, I would have just listened – NOT TRYING to find and fix their problems, but to hear them out and understand where THEY wanted to grow most and where THEY could find the most healing in both God and in

themselves. Taking Jesus' example in the Gospels would have meant for me that I didn't take my helpfulness so far that I underestimated what God could do for them if I just respected their agency and power within themselves. All Dove, and God, may have wanted and needed from me was to be a person to allow Dove to feel safe and respected.

I know first-hand how much I have yearned for this space and trust and hated to feel fixed as if I was a problem and not a person. Earlier on in the New Year of 2021, I started to develop a considerable bit of anxiety which scared me. As a helper by nature, I felt like I wasn't the person that was supposed to have anxiety; only the person who helps others get through it. I don't remember what was causing me this anxiety; I just know I did what I usually do with a lot of my emotions and let them keep piling up until the point where an experience with another person pushed me over the edge and I started experiencing what I now know for sure to be anxiety or panic attacks. I would be totally fine on minute and then the next I would be suddenly hit by a flood of different emotions, followed by an increase in heart rate, fast-paced breathing, shaking, and uncontrollable crying. Too often, when I tried to open up about my anxiety, I was not respected and held by my peers. Instead, my close friends who I would open up to would try to solve my problems for me by pushing for more answers, which only made me feel as though I was sitting in front of interrogators rather than people who were concerned for my well-being. Though their attempts to fix me came from a good place, it was almost as if these friends didn't trust that I knew my own condition well enough. Ironically, these approaches did not heal me; if anything, it caused my stress to keep coming back to me over and over again. I started to believe that letting people in, no matter what their intent may be, was a foolish mistake because telling others how I felt often led to me feeling worse than before I said anything. It was ironic how every time I was pushed for more information and to divulge all my feelings to my friends because they "had to know" to heal my problems, the more anxious I became and the less likely I was to seek their comfort again. My peers, of course, were just trying to be helpful. However, I wonder if it was possible that their own fear and stress clouded their judgment and caused them to act in a way that was more about THEM feeling good or in control than it ever was about me.

Like the woman with hemorrhages and Jairus' daughter, I too yearn to be respected and not immediately judged because I pose a threat to other's sense of security. I want it to be known that just because I sometimes need healing, I am also still sacred and worthy of trust. I am not broken or incomplete. So with both the Gospel and my personal stories in mind, I offer you this humble wisdom: Instead of immediately trying to fix the hurting people you see around you, remember our reading of the day, and remember Jesus who heals by seeing people as they are. Engage in active listening where you hear others out, then affirm, and then ask for permission if its ok to give them your advice and, importantly, be ok if they just want you to be someone that they can talk to and feel listened to. Even in modern times, we need to do better as a society keep people from feeling like they are broken. Maybe THAT Is the greatest healing we can ever offer.

***Madeline Virginia Weiser (Maddie)
Rising Senior & Youth Member***

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