

“Love heals every body”
Healing as salvation, Mark 5.20-43

As you may know, I spent most of the week in Nashville at the Theology and Peace Conference (that I’ve been helping plan all year). The conference was held on the campus of ABC, American Baptist College, an historical black college that has graduated many civil rights leaders, among them Congressman John Lewis. The conference theme was, “Accepting the invitation to the Beloved Community.”

It was a *good* conference...holy...profound...challenging...nourishing...transforming...

I begin with this to let you know that what I experienced and witnessed this week was the lens for seeing and listening to the healing stories for today, the healing of the 12-year-old girl and the woman with 12 years of bleeding.

And Trinity. Trinity permeated...is permeating all of it.

So that you have a sense of what has been forming and shaping this sermon, I want to share several pieces with you.

One piece comes from Dr. Harris, president of ABC. In his address at the conference, one of the things he talked about was “liberation [as] the politics of love” and that MLK’s mission was about stitching love to life. He talked about the cross being the needle that does the stitching. Like a quilt, the cross stitches *love* through racism, hegemony, sexism... stitching us into humanity.

Another piece is Thistle Farms. As part of the conference, we visited Thistle Farms. Their mission is “to heal, empower, and employ women survivors of trafficking, prostitution, and addiction. [They] do this by providing safe and supportive housing, the opportunity for economic independence, and a strong community of advocates and partners.” Becca Stevens, an Episcopal priest and founder of Thistle Farms, talked to us about their work. One of the things that she talked about was the importance of economics as part of each woman’s healing and saving. The women who are part of the program aren’t free if they don’t have economic freedom. At Thistle Farms they understand that healing and liberating and saving happen in an economy of love, not metaphorically, but literally, every *body* is loved, a love that includes a means of financial independence.

And the third piece is Trinity. Most of us have likely been taught that the Trinity is a doctrine about three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Together they are One God, One God with three facets, like a triangle. Recently, reading Cynthia Bourgeault’s book, *The Holy Trinity and The Law of Three*, she gave language to what I have been intuiting for some time. She argues that, rather than three static persons defined by a doctrine, the Trinity instead is a *process*. It is the process of God creating life, a creative process that *reconciles*, that moves us from 2 to 3. From the opposition of binaries and dualisms (2), Trinity is at work reconciling, bringing some new to life that hadn’t been there before, a 3rd thing. An immediate example is the *process* that raised up Jesus. The resurrection is something new—in resurrection, Jesus wasn’t returned to life as he had been, and clearly he wasn’t dead. Out of the binary of alive and dead, Trinity *reconciled the two* and opened up resurrection, a new kind of life and aliveness.

So with these three pieces—love stitching us into humanity; the economy of love that heals every body; and Trinity, the process the reconciles two irreconcilable things and brings something new into being—with these three pieces, let’s turn to the healing stories, a healing within a healing.

We know these stories well. A woman who, because she can’t stop bleeding, has been unclean for 12 years. And so she lives on the outside, excluded, on the streets, invisible. A no

body. But she hasn't given up hope...not completely. When Jesus comes to town, she joins the crowd and pushes her way through to Jesus. And when she gets to him, she touches his clothes. That's all she wants. It's all she needs. And the bleeding stops. And Jesus tells her, "Your faith has healed you."

Then there's the 12-year-old. Unlike the woman, this girl *is* somebody. Her father has a name; he's a leader in the synagogue. And he goes to Jesus, advocating for her. There is urgency in the father's request. But of course Jesus won't be hurried, not even for a leader in the community. He stops his movement to Jairus' house, taking time to engage the unclean, nameless woman. And while he's talking to her, while *she* is being healed, the little girl is dying. But when he gets there, Jesus simply takes her hand and resurrects her.

There are multiple layers to these healings. Mark points to us to one of these layers with the number 12. Twelve of course signals the 12 tribes of ancient Israel. It isn't coincidence or an incidental detail that 12 is part of both of these stories: the woman has been bleeding for 12 years and that the little girl is 12-years-old. Mark is pointing us to a larger context, to a body of people beyond these two individual bodies.

The religious structure of this ethnic group functioned in a binary system that divided people into clean and unclean. And *touch* is one of the things that made people unclean; and touch could also make unclean people clean, holy. The woman knew this...she knew that touching Jesus would move her from the unclean category and into the clean category. (The word *touch* is used often in the Hebrew Bible, most often in Leviticus.)

But Jesus, the beloved Son of God, who was formed by Triune God, wasn't interested in the binary of clean and unclean. He didn't pronounce her clean. Nor did he accept that it was *touch* that healed her. Instead, the reconciling Trinity created something new, "Your *faith* has healed you." God's salvation doesn't move us from unclean to clean; God's salvation is something entirely new.

This healing, this salvation happens while the little girl is dying. Within an understanding of Trinity as process, we see Trinity at work in this story in the *process* of healing. Healing isn't just about the binary categories of sick and well, diseased or healthy; rather, the healing of our Triune God is a *process* of bringing new life into existence. When God heals us, we aren't like we were before we were sick—we're a new creation.

As the story is told, we see that the moment when power leaves Jesus body is the same moment the little girl dies. Jesus experiences the loss of power, a kind of dying. This is part of the Trinitarian process...we must go through the process of death to experience healing and salvation.

Jesus knew this and was prepared for it. He understood that in order for a new way of living, a living beyond the boundaries of clean and unclean, beyond the categories of sick and healthy, in order for new life to rise up, there had to be a dying. So of course he wasn't surprised that the girl had died! Jesus understood that resurrection—of one kind or another—a rising up follows death.

On our visit to Thistle Farms, we heard other women tell their stories, the process of their healing. The women came into the program unclean—they'd been on the streets, in prison, selling their bodies, addicted to drugs. They were at the bottom. And they had hit rock bottom. Their resurrection began the moment they entered into the program at Thistle Farms. The program is founded on the belief that "love heals every body." It is their belief, their faith that "in the end, love is the most powerful force for change in the world." And so they welcome each woman with love, asking "What happened to you?"

By asking, "What happened to you," Thistle Farms is stepping into the love and life and process of Trinity. They understand that women don't end up on the streets because they are

good or bad people, or because they've made good or bad choices. "What happened to you" opens space for a new life to rise up. There is no blame given, no fault assigned...only an opening for healing, for saving, for new life.

The stories are holy, told by women who suffered deep wounds in their bodies and spirits. They have done deep, hard work to let love heal them, body and spirit. And they are beautiful new creations.

One of the women, I'll call her Angel, told us how much she loves her mother, that she talks with her every day, and considers her one of her best friends. It is the miracle of love, of healing that has given Angel a new life, one in which she loves her mother. It's a miracle because her mother, when Angel was only six-years-old, brought Angel to her bed with her boyfriend to participate in their sexual activity. She left home as a 13-year old and to survive life on the streets, unsurprisingly she started selling her body. And selling drugs to support her addiction. And everything else you can imagine.

It was in the process of healing, through the power of love—of being stitched by love—that she forgave her mother. And love between Angel and her mother was created, and grew, and is now flourishing. Another woman, after telling her story, a story that includes the love of her husband and children and the life she now loves, said that she would do it all again if that's what it takes to get to being who she is today, living her amazing life.

This strong faith that loves heals every body is stitched through all the projects at Thistle Farms. But it isn't enough that bodies and relationships are healed, the fullness of salvation is realized in an economy of love. A literal economy. So Thistle Farms makes and sells candles and lotions and other products. They have a café. They provide an economic means for healing and salvation.

And it isn't just for women in Nashville; they have projects around the globe. A project in Greece, #love welcomes. They trained nine women in the refugee camp to make welcome mats, weaving the orange fabric from their life vests into the mats. Then they provide a broad distribution and market to sell the mats in a shared trade—the women getting a percentage of the retail price. Their economy of love opens up new futures for refugee women to move out of the camps, having trained another woman to replace her. One body at a time, woman and children who were refugees are reunited with their families. And they are healed...and saved.

This is what the process of healing...of saving...looks like when we live in the fullness of a Triune God. We are stitched into being, every body, stitched with love. A powerful, transforming love. A love that stitches with the cross, healing us from the inside out from the violence of our oppositional ways into the unity of resurrection, a new creation, a humanity stitched with love.