***What Keeps Canadians Awake at Night 2: Health Care***

**A Sermon Preached at Lawrence Park Community Church, January 28, 2018**

**Mark 8:13b-30**

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Today I am going to speak, for a short while, about the second most common reason that Canadians lie awake at night, at least according to an Abacus poll from last year: Health Care.

Fully fourteen percent of Canadians (compared to over 50% in the United States) sometimes lie awake worrying about health care: whether they will get it, whether it will be high quality, whether they will be able to get a doctor, whether they have to wait too long, and whether or not they will be able to afford the meds that are prescribed.

I’ll get back to that fourteen percent in a minute. But first, I want to put it in the context of today’s scripture. Jesus healed a blind man in Bethsaida. Some people had brought him to Jesus and asked Jesus to touch him. That’s it. They thought that would be enough.

But it isn’t. Jesus has to spit into his hands, and rub the saliva in the man’s eyes. Then, when Jesus asks him if he can see, the blind man doesn’t say, “Yes, thank you Lord!” No, he says, “well, sort of. A little bit.” So, Jesus tries again. He lays hands on him—whether with or without more spit isn’t clear. Then Jesus stares at him. And finally, the man can see again.

It is all a bit strange. Jesus seems to fumble this miracle. Instead of a fancy deke at the end of a break-away, Jesus has to bang at the puck a few times in front of the net to make it go in. It isn’t very pretty. Bible scholars scratch their heads and wonder what this story might mean, why it is told this way.

Mostly, they think the story of the blind man is actually a parable that Mark has made up for Jesus to act out. The blind man, in this reading, is really a stand-in for the disciples. You see, like the blind man, the disciples can’t see Jesus for who he really is; or they can only make out Jesus vaguely, as if he were a tree rather than a person. Both the story before this healing, and the story after, in fact focus on the stubborn blindness of the disciples when it came to seeing who Jesus is.

So, before the healing of the blind man, Jesus is upset because in spite of the fact—according to the story Mark tells—in spite of the fact that he has miraculously fed 4,000, and then 5,000 people on a single sack lunch, the disciples are worried about food. They don’t get it. So, Jesus asks them: “Do you have eyes and fail to see?”

And then, after this miracle, Jesus asks the disciples who he thinks he is. Their answers are ridiculous. John the Baptist. Elijah. Maybe a prophet. Maybe someone else. All the answers are wrong! Even after being reminded of the miraculous feedings, and even after the healing of the blind man, the disciples don’t see Jesus for who he is, and what he has done. And the rest of the chapter, which we didn’t read, is more of the same. Peter finally says, “well, you might be the Messiah.” But when Jesus says he is going to be a suffering Messiah, Peter says, “no way!” And Jesus, disgusted, says to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan.”

The disciples live with Jesus, listen to Jesus, watch Jesus, but they don’t see who he really is, and they don’t see the bigger picture. They want a wonder working magician Jesus. But the real Jesus turns out to be a savior by example, who demonstrates in his life and in his death that people are worth dying for. It is one of the hardest Biblical lessons, one that we, like the disciples don’t much like. But there it is. Do you see it?

But now I want to get back to the whole “lying awake about health care” thing. Like the disciples, one of the issues we sometimes struggle with is a failure to see the miracles all around us. We are, are usually surprised when things don’t work out as quickly or as easily as we would like them to. So perhaps some context will help.

In the New Testament, Jesus does about forty miracles, including about 30 or 35 healings, depending on how you count them up. And then, depending on whether we are a United Church person or a Fundamentalist Baptist or maybe a Roman Catholic, we sometimes sit back in our arm chairs and argue about whether or not these miracles really happened. That’s okay, as far as it goes.

But forget those forty miracles for a minute. What I’d like to ask, this morning, is this. What about the millions, perhaps billions of healing miracles in Canada and around the world that we take for granted every day? Do we stop, often enough, to admire what is happening all around us?

Here is what I mean—just a brief little story. When William was about three years old, and Irene and I were both graduate students, we visited some friends for an evening of Risk—a board game. The tea pot was on the floor, beside a couch, on a hot air register. Meanwhile, William, was climbing the couch like a monkey, wrapped in three layers of pajamas because it was cold.

The next thing you know, William falls off the couch, onto the tea pot, and is badly burned, to the third degree, around his shoulder and under his arm. We couldn’t help him at first, because we had to take the PJs off, and that took a while, and it was excruciatingly painful for William and we rushed him to the hospital which was a few blocks away. It was awful.

What happened next is interesting. Though there were ointments and meds, tears and bandages, hand wringing and regrets for weeks after, the one thing we never worried about was whether or not William would live. Of course, he would live. We never doubted it.

But here is the thing. One hundred years ago, in the 1920s, simple burns like William’s were the third leading cause of accidental death in the USA, and so probably in Canada too. Just 100 years ago, in the 1920s.

But there is more. One hundred years ago the number one cause of all deaths in the was diarrhea, followed by TB and pneumonia. Do you know anyone who has died of diarrhea?

There is more. Two hundred years ago, nearly 50% of children worldwide died by the age of five from diseases and accidents. By one hundred years ago, mostly due to the discovery of germs and the need for cleanliness, that had dropped to 33% of children who died, worldwide, from diseases and accidents before the age of five. Today—including the whole world, not just the developed West, that number is less than 5%. Do you see this miracle of bread and loaves, of the blind seeing? Do you understand its import and significance? Have you, unlike the disciples, stopped to think what it means.

Of course, we lie awake with our personal worries about medical care—most of us, in fact, lie awake with such worries well into our eighties or nineties, and almost unheard-of age to live to 100 years ago—but an age we all reasonably hope for now. Our mortality, our aches and pains, our worries about health and health care shouldn’t be minimized or dismissed.

But what also ought to keep us awake at night is the real miracle of what we do have. Amazing, incredible, nearly unimaginable—at least 100 years ago—health care.

Our health care system—like Jesus’ bumbling cure of a man’s blindness, in our text—is not perfect. Our system is not always speedy, especially when it comes to elective care. Yes, meds are expensive, and achingly out of reach for too many Canadians. And naturally, we can always count on the newspapers to focus on a few medical cases that went wrong, sometimes spectacularly so, rather than the millions of people who are patched up, healed, or sent on their way better every year.

But no one today is dying of polio, or small pox, or typhoid, or diarrhea. Heart attacks are not a death sentence. Cancer, a disease of old age, mostly, is being beaten back, bit by bit. Most infections do not kill. We think of kidney transplants—even heart transplants—as almost routine.

It’s amazing. It’s beautiful. It’s a health care system that isn’t perfect—just as none of us is perfect. But still, wow. Look around. This is a good time to be alive. We don’t have merely 40 or 45 miracles; modern medicine has given us billions.

It’s a beautiful, reassuring thing. Thank God.