

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Just say the word, Jesus! Could it be that Jesus has already spoken words of healing into our lives?"

Scripture: Luke 7:1-17

Communion Sunday

Rev. Steve Filyk

February 7, 2021

Hymns/Choruses: #291 -- Thou whose almighty word, #644 -- May the mind of Christ my Saviour, What a beautiful name (Hillsong),
Amazing Love (Graham Kendrick)

Let me tell you a couple stories
About your fellow-Canadians:

"When [John Arnedt's] daughter, Andrea,
came home from elementary school
upset about **losing a track and field race**,
he naturally put things in perspective.

"Well, someone has to," John told her kindly.

It was a lesson on resilience
that she'd carry with her for years.

John's matter-of-fact responses
helped his kids and grandkids see the bigger picture.

When Andrea was frustrated
about her own son's thumb-sucking habit,
John reminded her not to sweat it.

"He won't be sucking his thumb
as he walks down the aisle!" he said with a laugh."ⁱ

That was John.
Now meet Deb.

“Every year on Nov. 12, Deb Diemer and her husband, Mike, brought out something like 50 Rubbermaid containers of Christmas decorations to deck the house.

For days ahead of their annual holiday bash, Deb was busy in the kitchen, cooking far too much food;

dozens of guests would end up leaving with Tupperwares of leftovers.

“You made sure you didn’t eat for a couple of days before you came to my wife’s party,” says Mike.

The social calendar was always full.

They’d celebrate “Gotcha Day” every April to commemorate the adoption of their daughter...

Deb organized dinners where newcomers to Calgary could share traditional dishes and get to know each other.

She invited neighbours for a drink on the deck.”ⁱⁱ

That’s John and Deb.

So what’s the connection between these two stories?

Both died from Covid-19.

According to one new report:

“if you tally up every death announced by every province and territory,

there were 15,606 people killed by the novel coronavirus
 in this country in 2020 –
 equivalent to nearly twice the population of Banff, Alta.

[This] number would have represented
 Canada's third-leading cause of death
 in any year since the turn of the century,
 according to Statistics Canada data.”ⁱⁱⁱ

All to say that if we wanted to hear the stories
 Of those who died from COVID,
 We'd be listening to stories all week.

And we'd meet all sorts of people.
 COVID hits every demographic,
 every race, or religion, or age group.

Yes our marginalised communities suffer disproportionately.
 But no-one is immune.
 COVID takes both grandparents
 And grandchildren alike.

In our middle-class, developed world communities
 We tend to feel invulnerable especially in our active years.

But COVID has poked a hold in our protective bubble.
 Now we all feel vulnerable.

PAUSE

Today we have already encountered another pair of individuals
 In our Bible reading In today's lesson from the Gospel of Luke.

It is a study of contrasts.

On one hand we have a centurion.

While centurions often came from the Roman working-class
they were leaders in the profession of arms.
They commanded one hundred soldiers
and were well-paid for the task.

The centurion we meet in Luke
Didn't just have soldiers under his command,
He had his own servants.

He was politically astute, if not devout,
As he contributed to the building of a local synagogue.

But for all the responsibilities or concern
That may occupy this centurion,
He is focused on one thing:
A valued servant, who is dying.

On the one hand we have a centurion.
On the other hand, we have a Jewish widow.

Luke tells us very little about the widow.
We are simply told that her only son had died.

I have often heard,
and I have often repeated
That widows were vulnerable in Jewish society.

My recent reading suggests, however,
 That in Jesus' time it was possible
 That women could both hold property
 And expand their interests.^{iv}

When Luke lists the financial backers of Jesus' ministry
 He names women, three women,
 And only one is noted as having a husband.^v

And seems that this widow in particular,
 has support or connections in her village.

We are told that "a large crowd from the town"
 Had joined the funeral procession for her son.

That being said
 It would still seem that she was vulnerable.
 Having no immediate male family members
 Would leave her exposed in a patriarchal society.

On the one hand we have a Centurion.
 On the other hand, we have a widow.
 You can easily notice the disparity in power.

And yet they are united together by a shared need
 And vulnerability:
 The loss and the potential loss of a loved one.

In the case of the Centurion, he knows something about Jesus.
 Through his Jewish connections he reaches out to Jesus
 And requests Jesus' intervention.

In the case of the widow, Jesus and his disciples
run into her son's funeral procession.

Jesus' heart goes out to her,
And he reaches out to her.

What follows in both situations is miraculous, an utterly amazing.

The centurion asks Jesus to 'just say the word'.

He knows that his servant can be healed by Jesus,
Even at a distance.

He is correct.

Jesus can do this.
And the servant is made well.

We are not told whether the widow

Even recognises Jesus through her tears,
But in her case Jesus simply calls her son
To get up from the platform on which he was lying.

This happens.

We are told that he sits up and talks.

All the onlookers are amazed.

"A great prophet has appeared among us"
they said to each other.^{vi}

So is Jesus just another prophet?

Those who knew their Jewish Bibles
would start wondering if he was something more...

While their Bible includes stories of long-distance healings
(Elisha and Namaan)

And the resurrection of dead children (Elisha and Elijah),
All those healings involve prayers or rituals.^{vii}

But when it comes to Jesus,
he simply 'says the word'
And the work of healing is done.

As one commentator notes:

"Despite the many and significant parallel
between Jesus' miracle
and the miracles performed by Elijah and Elisha,
there is a major difference...

in that whereas Elijah must pray to God
and three times stretch himself upon the dead lad
before he revives,

Jesus merely speaks the word of command
and the dead one is raised up...
Jesus superior power is clearly illustrated..."^{viii}

Jesus is more than a prophet.

Jesus "heals not merely through delegated authority from God,
but on his own authority, without rituals or prayers,
but with a simple word of power."^{ix} PAUSE

In comparison to most of the world
We are all extraordinarily wealthy and powerful.

And yet COVID-19 has exposed our vulnerabilities.
Despite all that we have,
we too can lose our loved ones.

We can and we do.

But COVID isn't the only danger.

I mean those stories I read at the beginning could just as easily
Have been about cancer or heart disease

COVID gets all the media attention,
and currently it has taken the lives
of over 20,000 Canadians.

But don't think that cancer or heart disease has disappeared.

They still hold top spots for stealing the lives of loved ones:
"In 2019, they accounted for 80,152 and 52,541 deaths,
respectively."^x

So does Jesus have a word for us in the midst of our anxiety?

Will Jesus just say the word
And rescue **us** from sickness and death?

Jesus still does speak words of healing to some of us.

Some of us have witnessed
Miracles done in his name.

But what about the rest of us?

PAUSE

You should know that Jesus has spoken powerful words
For all of us:

Words that address
every situation of vulnerability and frailty,
Words that speak to all our anxieties and fears.

He spoke these words from the cross:
“It is finished” Jesus said.^{xi}

Jesus main purpose was not to rescue
Us from our frailties,
But to complete God’s rescue mission.

Jesus came to buy our forgiveness
so that we can have peace in our everyday living
whether we are healthy or ailing.

Jesus came to purchase our salvation
so we will have confidence in our dying,
which we will all do, one day.

“Just say the word,” we plead.
“It is finished” Jesus replies.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

ⁱ Hayley Tubrett “John Bernard Arnedt” in “They were loved” <https://www.macleans.ca/they-were-loved/>

ⁱⁱ Marie-Danielle Smith “Deb Diemer” in “They were loved” <https://www.macleans.ca/they-were-loved/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ryan Flanagan “How Canada’s COVID-19 death toll stacks up to history” January 5, 2021 www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/how-canada-s-covid-19-death-toll-stacks-up-to-history-1.5254420

^{iv} See Susan E. Hylen “Widows in the New Testament Period” <https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/articles/widows-new-testament-period>

^v Luke 8:1-3

^{vi} Luke 7:16

^{vii} See 2 Kings 5 for the healing of Naaman and for the resurrection stories see 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4.

^{viii} Craig A. Evans “1 Kings 17:8-16” The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels 350

^{ix} Sinclair Ferguson as quoted in “Raising of the son of the widow of Nain” *Wikipedia*

^x Ryan Flanagan “How Canada’s COVID-19 death toll stacks up to history” January 5, 2021 www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/how-canada-s-covid-19-death-toll-stacks-up-to-history-1.5254420

^{xi} John 19:30