

There's a concept that Jesus talks about in all four gospels, that you may be familiar with called the Kingdom of God. In Mark's gospel, which we read from today, Jesus talks about it as something that is already here but not yet fully. It is how the world, all the way to the cosmos operates, when it is in union with divine love. The kingdom of God is the wholeness of God, innately manifest in every part of creation down to our molecular beings. This wholeness just needs to be remembered and nurtured to fullness, so that everything it can embody, God's harmony and peace, including every human being. Can you imagine what it would be like to live in a world that is a complete manifestation of God's wholeness? I wonder how it would feel and I wonder what would be different. Can you imagine what would it be like for you to be completely whole in your mind, body and spirit? I wonder how you would feel, and what about you would be different. This imagining inevitably brings up areas in which we are not experiencing God's perfect wholeness in ourselves or in the world around us, but instead our longing for God's kingdom to arrive.

You may be longing for restoration in your physical body or healing in your mental health or in your emotional heart. Yet while we wait and long for God's kingdom, we also have this innate wholeness of God in our innermost beings. As Jesus says in Luke's gospel, "The kingdom of God is in you." In other words, God's innate wholeness is sown into the very essence of your being. God's wholeness is a part of you and no ailment or disease, or emotional experience, or loss, no person or system, or injustice, or belief can take this wholeness of God away from you.

Turning to our gospel reading this morning, we meet a woman who has every reason to doubt that God's wholeness is within her. She has been tormented by internal bleeding for 12 years, and while she has endured much under multiple physicians and has spent all of her money on treatments, she hasn't found a cure. Suffering a disease would have made her perceived as unclean in her culture and therefore isolated within her community. She wouldn't have been allowed to participate in her synagogue, and her condition may have prevented her from being married. All of this would threaten her very ability to

survive. And it would negatively impact her reputation and her identity. In this way, her disease doesn't just take a toll on her physically, but also financially and relationally, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. It impacts every area of her life.

I wonder if she can imagine what it would be like to live in a world that is a complete manifestation of God's wholeness, or what it would be like to be completely whole in her own mind and body and spirit. I wonder how she would feel and what would be different, or how she experiences her own deep longing for God's kingdom to arrive. After 12 years of suffering this affliction, the woman hears whispers about a man named Jesus. He has healed multitudes of people from their ailments and has been traveling around Cana and Galilee, healing people of diseases and physical injuries, as well as casting out demons. In other words, Jesus's healings don't just resolve the presenting issue, they go to the root of the problem. They heal the deeper spiritual wound. So the woman finds Jesus in the crowd and reaches out her hand to touch his cloak. Energy leaves Jesus's body and she is immediately healed of her disease. Then immediately after healing the hemorrhaging woman, Jesus goes to heal a 12-year-old girl who is close to death. He enters her house and tells those in mourning that this girl is not dead but asleep. He then goes to her bed and reaches out his hand saying, "Little girl, get up." And she rises up and walks about.

Whenever we have such obvious parallels in a story like the number 12 or two sick women, or stories that overlap, we have to stop and pay attention. And if we read these stories more symbolically or as a continuation of one another, we could see how the woman and girl mirror one another. This 12-year-old girl could represent something painful that happened to the woman at that age. A trauma that is the source of her incurable disease perhaps has caused a part of her to shut down as if it was asleep. Jesus has to enter into the woman's inner room to wake this part of her up and restore her to wholeness in her adult years. This story can also be a mirror for each of us, prompting us to ask, what pain am I still caring that needs healing? How can I go into the inner chambers of myself to bring compassion and love, in order to be restored to wholeness?

Brené Brown tells a story in her book, *Atlas of the Heart*, that can help illustrate this idea. A girl named Carmen was preparing for her quinceañera, a coming-of-age celebration in many Latin communities, which is a special milestone for girls who are turning 15. Carmen knew that this would be an emotional event for her, as her mother had died of ovarian cancer when she was 12 years old. She also knew that she would be given the tiara her mother had worn on her own quinceañera, and so she had prepared herself for this moment. The night before her big party, Carmen was sitting in her room texting with friends, when her dad, accompanied by her siblings, knocked on her door. A little nervously, the father handed Carmen a box, and as expected, Carmen found the tiara her mother had left her. And she felt relieved that this moment had finally arrived and would soon be past. Then unexpectedly, Carmen's dad handed her an envelope. He could barely speak. "Your mother wrote this note the week before she died, and she wanted you to open it the day before your quinceañera." Carmen took the letter and immediately sunk to the floor in tears, and her siblings and father also began to weep, crying and burying their heads in their hands.

Brené reflects on this story saying, "What we think is a familiar grief, a grief we've come to know and understand and even integrate into our lives, can surprise us again and again, often in the form of anguish." This is especially true when something sparks shock in us like the letter that Carmen's mother had written her. In other words, the grief Carmen experienced at 12 years old continued to live in her body even after she understood and processed it. It could reemerge in a second because a part of Carmen still needed healing. And we all have experiences that continue to live on in our bodies that need healing. And one of the ways that we bring God's kingdom into reality is through going into these places of pain, so that we can receive that healing and we can grow God's wholeness inside of us. And this inner work then grows God's kingdom in the world around us. Father Richard Rohr says, "If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it, usually to those closest to us. Our family, our neighbors, our coworkers, and invariably the most vulnerable, our children." The Jesus story is about radically transforming history and individuals

so that we don't just keep handing on the pain to the next generation.

Father Rohr goes on to say that we don't transform our pain through fixing or controlling or understanding. We do it through faith. And he defines faith as the ability to stand in liminal space. To stand on the threshold. To hold the contraries until we are moved by grace to a much deeper level and a much larger frame. And this is what the woman in our story is doing. She's gotten to a point beyond trying to fix, control or understand, and is now seeking Jesus out. She's standing on the threshold of the kingdom of God that's already present but not yet fully. And she is bringing both her pain and her hope. And in touching just the hem of Jesus's cloak, her healing is moved to a deeper level, allowing her to move beyond her solitary pain so she can recognize the pain that we are all carrying, and even become a source of healing to others through the transformation that she receives. When Jesus realized what has happened, he says, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed." Her pain has been transformed and she can now hand on the grace she received to the next generation.

And this is the work that we are all called to do. To be transmitters of grace and agents of healing, but we have to courageously find healing within ourselves first. And healing within ourselves means being able to face the reality of our suffering, while knowing that nothing can take away the wholeness of God that is in you. No disease or illness or experience, no loss or belief or injustice can take away the wholeness sewn into our innermost beings. And like the hemorrhaging woman, we heal through holding our pain and our hope, the already and not yet of God's kingdom, that is growing inside of us and nurturing it to fullness. So may your faith make you well. Knowing that no matter what you are suffering, the wholeness of God is within you. Amen.