

Theme: Where Science and Religion Meet

“Medical Science and the Power of Faith”

Based upon a sermon series by the Rev. Adam Hamilton
January 27th, 2008 at First United Methodist Church – Durango

Luke 8: 43-48

43 A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure. 44 Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of his robe. Immediately, the bleeding stopped.

45 “Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

Everyone denied it, and Peter said, “Master, this whole crowd is pressing up against you.”

46 But Jesus said, “Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt healing power go out from me.” 47 When the woman realized that she could not stay hidden, she began to tremble and fell to her knees before him. The whole crowd heard her explain why she had touched him and that she had been immediately healed. 48 “Daughter,” he said to her, “your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”

SLIDE “Medicine Science and the Power of Faith.”

Please take out of your bulletin your sermon notes and your study guide. The sermon notes are a chance for you to follow along and there are places to write down things you might like to remember from today's sermon. The study guide is a chance for you to do some reading of the Bible on your own and to follow up on the themes that we are talking about this morning.

Today we continue in our series of sermons, "Where Science and Religion Meet," by turning to the field of medical science. We are going to look at how medical science relates to our physical well-being from a Christian perspective. More than that, we will also be focusing on what Christianity brings to the table. What does our faith and our spirituality bring into our lives in terms of healing?

We also will look at our perspective on suffering and sickness as people of faith. Finally, we will try to listen to what God's Word might be for our lives in the passage of Scripture we have before us today about the woman who was healed by Jesus.

We must acknowledge as we begin today that many of us are interested in how medical science and our faith converge. There have been several books on the New York Times bestseller list dealing with this topic. Almost every major news magazine has had this as a cover story. This cover was on Newsweek.

SLIDE God and Health: Is religion good science? Why science is starting to believe.

Clearly we want to recognize that there is some connection here—but what is it?

For a long time the areas of medical science, psychology and religion have sort of divided up the person. We have said that people have a mind and psychologists should treat that. People have a body and the physician should treat that. People have a soul and the pastors should treat that.

SLIDE Body-Mind-Spirit

We recognize this as a convenient way to look at a person but can you neatly divide your self up that way? Of course you can't. What happens in your spiritual life affects your mind. What happens in your mind affects your physical well-being.

I found this out several years ago in a very concrete way. We moved here to Durango in 2002 in the midst of the Missionary Ridge fire. When we drove from Denver to Durango that summer we passed 64 wildfires and because of the fire my wife and I postponed a vacation we had planned and had no break between leaving one church in moving to this church. We had no furniture because the moving truck didn't arrive for a week. We lived on the floor the Parsonage which is this house next door.

On our first night here our dog got skunked and my wife found herself wandering through City Market with cashiers frantically pointing towards the tomato juice section from a distance. I was nervous coming to a new church and I wanted to make a good impression because I followed a popular pastor and I remember feeling tense and uptight much the time. The air in Durango was thick with smoke from the fire and many of you who were displaced from your homes were storing family heirlooms in the church garage. I met with some of you and we prayed because you had no idea if there would be a home for you to go to when the fire subsided.

We had “get acquainted” desserts scheduled for most nights of the

week so I could get to know you in my new congregation. I felt overwhelmed by all of this and I had a hard time sleeping at night because my heart would start to race as I lay in bed. I would say quick and short prayers but I really had no time for God in a serious way. But one of the ways that I deal with stress is that I talk to God and I stopped doing that because I was simply too busy.

During a time of prayer I give my burdens to God but if I am not praying then I carry those burdens all by myself. This pressure began to mount as the stress built inside of me. I dismissed the pressure and the rapid heartbeat for several days which is not a bright thing to do.

Finally, I said something to my wife Tami about how I was feeling and she encouraged me to go see the doctor.

So I went and saw a doctor who put me on a heart monitor and they discovered I had an extra beat in the lower chamber of my heart. The doctor told me that 80% of the population had this condition but that we usually didn't notice it unless we were under some stress. He asked if I had felt any stress lately and then told me to go home and relax.

What I began to see in my own life was that a buildup of stress would manifest itself in physical ways that took me to the doctor.

This is how it works. We are not neatly divided into body, mind and spirit. All three of these are interconnected.

I spoke this last week with several physicians and health professionals. I asked each one of them what they thought about the connection between the body and the mind and spirit.

Dr. Kelly Miller works with Pediatric Partners of the Southwest and also happens to be my children's pediatrician. Dr. Elizabeth Helms works with Durango Nephrology Associates. Dr. Kip Boyd is Chief Medical Officer at Mercy Regional Medical Center. Melinda Mical and Suzanne Bolton are nurses who direct Integrative Care Services at Mercy. Dr. Miller and Dr. Helms are members of this church and I know there are many more of you who attend this church who serve in the healthcare field.

It was a real blessing to visit with each one of these persons this week and talk with them about medical science and faith and how they come together. My time with Melinda and Suzanne was especially enjoyable because they actually showed me how they work with patients who are

preparing or recovering from surgery or other illnesses. As you will see, they really helped me to relax as they talked with me about the body and the mind and the soul and how those interact. Let's hear what each of them had to say.

VIDEO Medical Science-Body, Mind and Spirit.

SLIDE Suffering, Sickness and God's Will in the Christian Life

There clearly seems to be a connection between the body and the mind and spirit. As we begin to look at that I think it would be helpful to stop for a minute and think about how we as Christians look at the reality of suffering and sickness and healing.

Some Christians look at God as a, "button pusher" or "lever puller." God is in heaven and he is like the Wizard of Oz. He is behind a curtain pushing buttons and pulling levers and making every thing happen in your life. Everything that happens in your life is God's will. God willed it and it was for ordained by God. God made it happen.

So we look at everything that happens and we accept it. We say that this must be the will of God and God did this thing. If I am sick then that sickness must come from God. God must be trying to teach me something or punish me or do something in my life through this sickness because everything that happens in life happens for a reason and comes from God.

That is one way of looking at what God does.

Personally, I find that a troubling way to look at God and how God acts in this world. I find it troubling because as a pastor I have dealt with a lot of people who have been through some very tragic things and I think, "Now you can't tell me that was from God."

In fact, the very character and nature of God that we see in Jesus Christ is very different from a God who might go about doing some of the things that we see happening to our friends or in our own bodies. I can't reconcile these two things.

I think about a child I had to visit once who was in a car accident and both of their legs were broken. The doctors were not sure they would ever walk correctly again, let alone be able to run like most children. Did God do that? Was that God's for ordained will for that child, to teach the child some lesson or to judge that child or to somehow punish the child?

I have two children. Would there ever come a time that I would break

both of their legs to teach them something or punish them? Not that I haven't thought about it on rare occasions—actually I have never thought about that—I would never break my children's legs in order to teach them something or to punish them in some way.

Likewise, can you ever fathom a time where a father would place cancer cells in his children to teach them character? Can you imagine reading that in the newspaper? Wouldn't that father be arrested for child abuse and put in prison and the children taken away?

And yet we say that God, our heavenly Father who loves more than we love, would do this to his children? I can't see that.

Some many of us look at illness and we realize that God does not send it our way. It is not that God can't do it, but it is out of character for God to routinely send things into our lives in this way.

God does want to perfect us, and teach us, and sometimes there are consequences to our actions that help us to learn, but I don't think God's ordinary way of doing things is to cause physical harm to his children.

If God is not doing these things, then where do they come from? It is not hard to think about where illness, sickness and bodily harm come from.

First, we know that sometimes we do bring things on ourselves. Sometimes what we do to our own bodies is not what God wants us to do but what we do destroys them.

SLIDE We are the cause of some of our physical problems.

The most recent surveys by the Center for Disease Control tell us that two thirds of adults in the United States are officially overweight, and about half of those are obese. The total medical tab for illnesses related to obesity is \$200 billion a year and climbing according to the Surgeon General. The Journal of the American Medical Association reported last year that poor diet and physical inactivity could soon overtake tobacco as the leading cause of preventable death in the United States.

Is that God's doing more our doing? Sometimes the physical illnesses or bodily problems we have are our own making and we are responsible for them.

SLIDE Our bodies age over time.

I also know that some of the things that happen to our bodies are just

part of growing old. Our bodies are designed for planned obsolescence. They are supposed to wear out somewhere along the way.

Our bodies begin wearing out by the time we are 18. From that point on they gradually wear out.

I remember people telling me to wait until I turned 40 and then only things would happen. I didn't believe them. How could my body completely fall apart when I turned 40? But you know what? It does. It happens just like that.

I was sitting in the hot tub at the recreation center and before I knew it the guy next to me and I were talking about the different body parts we have that are wearing out. I talked about my bad knee and my bad foot. He talked about his bad shoulder and his bad elbow. Before long we were thoroughly depressed.

The other day I was in a restaurant and I couldn't hear what people were saying across the table and so I found myself putting my hand to my ear and turning my ear towards them. The guy sitting next to me said I look like an old man doing that I should just go get a hearing aid. I told them I was only 44 and I'm not getting a hearing aid. This is what happens as we age and part of it, for me, is from too many rock concerts where I hung out in front of the speakers. I thought it was great to not be able to hear for three or four days. My parents told me that this would happen but I didn't believe them.

There are other things I won't even tell you about that are starting to break down. This is the nature of being human, that we break down over time.

SLIDE Sometimes our bodies' cells malfunction.

Our bodies are amazing systems that can self heal. If I drop my laptop computer from over my head it would be destroyed. But I fall down from that distance and my body will repair itself. How amazing is that?

But at the same time, every once in a while, of the billions of cells that make up your body, one of them will go astray. It mutates and then it begins to reproduce. It reproduces cells that serve no function and they just sap all the energy from the rest of your cells. We call those tumors when this happens sometimes in our bodies. It's just a part of the deal when you have that many cells that occasionally something will go wrong.

I don't think God wills this but it is part of what happens sometimes.

One of the things I learned in college was that in the computer industry they have a standard called:

SLIDE MTBF = Mean Time Between Failure.

They look to see how long a time is between when something is manufactured and when it will break down. The MTBF for human beings is 75 years. That is the average life expectancy and it is a pretty amazing thing. You can manufacture something in the womb and it pretty much runs by itself for 75 years without you even doing a good job of taking care of it.

Imagine if an automobile manufacturer told you that they came up with a car that was so well-built they would give you a 75 year warranty. It doesn't matter how you take care of it or if you take it in for tune-ups. You can do whatever you want to and you'll be able to drive it for 75 years. We want the whole thing bumper-to-bumper.

No manufacturer would do that—and yet that is exactly what happens in most of our bodies.

This is an amazing machine that we have and we are fearfully and wonderfully made, the Scripture says. But yes, sometimes things do go wrong in our bodies.

So how do we look at illness in our bodies as Christians? If we understand that it is not God doing these things it is part of what happens we still have to figure out what to do with illness and how we look at it.

There are two things I find helpful when I think about this.

First, I have to remember that God's will for my life and my aim as a Christian is not to live to be 100. The Bible does not ever say that the aim of the Christian life is to live as long as you possibly can. That is not the aim of my life.

I do want to live as long as possible. I would love to live to be a hundred and be physically and mentally well. I think I've shared with you my fantasy before. I live to be 100 and Tami lives to be 95. We share a room in a nursing home on a certain night, maybe our 83rd anniversary, we lay down together in bed and hold each other in our arms and we wake up to see the big bright light.

I kind of like that idea. I don't think it is very likely, but I like the idea.

I also recognize that that is not necessarily God's will for my life. God's primary design for my life is not to make me live as long as possible here, but to get me ready to live in God's eternal kingdom. In the wonderful words of Charles Wesley in his great hymn, "A Charge to Keep I Have," God hopes to have me, "fitted for the sky."

This life is about preparing me, in getting me ready. This life is about helping me shape my soul after the image of Christ and become like him, to be useful to God, and then ultimately be ready to meet him face to face.

That does not have anything to do with whether I live to be a hundred or 45. Ultimately, I realize that suffering and sickness may play some role in helping me be ready to be with Christ.

When I am sick with the flu and have to stay at home in bed. I will sleep for part of that time. It may very well be that my time of being sick and laying in bed is a moment that God will use to sanctify me.

SLIDE The aim of the Christian life - sanctification

The word "sanctification" means, "to be made holy," or to come to "love God perfectly," or to, "love our neighbor as we love ourselves." Maybe while I am lying in bed being sick there is an opportunity for me to stop and read the Bible. Maybe I can spend time in prayer that I wouldn't spend time doing otherwise. Maybe I can write notes of encouragement to those that I love. The point is that there is a place for God to sanctify me even in illness and suffering. God can work through those things.

Let me be clear that I don't believe that God sends those things to us but when they come there are opportunities for God to work in perfecting us in readiness for his eternal kingdom.

There are opportunities for us when we are sick to be useful to God. I think of all the Christians that I've seen who are deeply committed to Christ, who are in the hospital and who have seen part of their role as ministering to the nurses who came in to see them. It is awesome to watch a Christian who understands part of their job in the hospital is to minister to the person who is their bedmate or roommate, or anyone who walks in the room.

I remember my great grandmother Grace Berry who lived to be 104 and spent her last 20 years in a nursing home. She believed that God put her in a nursing home to minister to the people who came in to take care of her. How wonderful and different is that from all the people who are cranky

there who are not very happy about the service they are getting from the people who work there for almost minimum-wage. She understood that God had put her in that place so she can be useful to God in those circumstances.

That's part of how we Christians look at sickness and suffering. Part of how we look at sickness and suffering has to do with our understanding of what happens to us after we die. We realize that death is not the worst thing that happens to us.

A physician shared that he worked with a patient who had to have heart surgery. The patient went to see the cardiologist who did a whole bunch of tests to see if he could really withstand the surgery. The patient was an older man and finally the cardiologist came and said to him, "You could die from the surgery given your cardiac condition."

The patient looked up as he was lying in the bed and he smiled and chuckled and said, "Listen doctor, in that case I win either way so cut away!"

That is an interesting kind of perspective to have on the fact that you might die on the operating table. "Either way I win. I know what lies beyond this life and I would kind of like to live longer here, but I know I get to live forever there, and either one of those things is okay with me."

The apostle Paul captured this in Philippians 1: 21 to 24 when he said these words.

SLIDE ***21 For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. 22 But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. 23 I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. 24 But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.***

That is the perspective we as Christians bring to our suffering into sickness and even to death as we recognize that even death is not the end of the line for us. The apostle Paul captured this also in Romans 5:

SLIDE ***3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. 5 And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.***

So we know where suffering comes from let's talk about the tangible benefits of faith.

SLIDE What does our faith do to promote healing?

One of the things that faith brings to the table is the capacity to trust. When we have faith in God we are capable of trusting God with our lives.

SLIDE The importance of trust.

That trust actually plays some role physiologically in enhancing our healing. Fear seems to inhibit healing but trust and relaxation seems to actually enhance healing. It certainly creates a higher quality of life when you're going through suffering and sickness. Once again the apostle Paul shares with us the importance of trust and faith in Philippians 4:6-7.

SLIDE *6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

How awesome and wonderful is that? When you are sick, to be able to simply say, "Lord I belong to you. My life is in your hands. I would like to get better. I will pray you will use the doctors and medicine and nurses to touch me directly. But my life belongs to you no matter what, and I will trust you wholly and completely."

When you can say that and you begin to really feel that inside, you feel a peace that will wash over you. Your heart which has felt anxious begins to still, and you feel that peace.

You may have to pray that over and over again because fear quickly seeps back in. You begin to sense that peace and then pretty soon fear comes back and so you pray again, "Okay Lord, once more I am yours."

That trust in peace which comes promotes healing. But hope also promotes healing. Dr. Jerome Groopman, who holds the Recondy Chair of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, wrote a book recently entitled, The Anatomy of Hope.

SLIDE The Anatomy of Hope.

The book is based on his experiences working with terminally ill

patients and what he learned by watching their lives and their examples. The book ends with these words.

SLIDE **“We are just beginning to appreciate hope’s reach and have not defined its limits. I see hope is the very heart of healing. For those who have hope it may help some to live longer, and it will help all to live better.”**

Let's turn once again to our healthcare providers as they explain hope from their perspective.

VIDEO **Medical Science-Hope.**

SLIDE **Sign of hope.**

I have known several persons who fit this category that Melinda Michael described. Medical science gave them no hope and yet they continue to live and even thrive up to the time of their death because they have hope. I also have known persons who once they have given up hope their bodies have shut down.

Hope plays an important role and our hope as Christians is based upon our faith. Our knowledge that God walks with us no matter what, even when we walk through the, "Valley of the shadow of death," brings us hope.

Our hope comes from knowing what lies beyond this life. Our hope comes from knowing that God is able to do beyond what we can imagine or believe. We are people of hope.

SLIDE **The impact of prayer.**

In addition to hope, one of the resources we bring to the table as Christians is prayer. Routinely there have been a number of studies which are trying to look at the health benefits of prayer. Most of the studies on prayer are really trying to measure God’s "supernatural abilities" to heal because they are double blind studies. That means that the people praying only know the first name of the people they are praying for, and those who are being prayed for don't even know it.

If you were really to look at this, I think you have to look at what happens when someone that you love comes to hold your hand and prays for you. We need to look at what happens when that person is on their knees praying for the person they love every day. We'd look at what happens when pastors come in to anoint persons in prayer. We have to look at what happens when the person being prayed for puts their trust in

Christ and cooperates with God through prayer. Then you might be able to see a real measurement of what prayer does in people's lives.

How does prayer work? This really gets into the idea of Providence and how God works in our lives. Some people think that prayer is about telling God what we want and God the Magic Genie does exactly what we ask. But God will not be manipulated like that, and God is not our Magic Genie who will do everything we want. There is a lot of stuff that God knows that you simply don't know.

I do believe that God is capable of doing miracles. I believe that, and I pray for miracles. In fact, every time I pray for someone who is sick, I pray for a home run. Recently I prayed for a young girl who is going through a life-threatening illness.

I prayed, "God this is an audacious prayer, but I'm going to pray for a grand slam, out of the park, home run kind of miracle. We are going to ask that you deliver this person from the sickness in some wonderful and delightful way. We also know that you work through doctors and so we pray that you will use her doctors and help them to know what is happening. We know that you use medicine and so we pray that the medicine will be effective. We pray that your spirit will bring peace and open up her body to receive the healing that you have. We know that you work through sickness and suffering and so we are committing this whole thing to you. You know our desires for complete healing and restoration, now we give the rest of the team."

I pray for miracles even though I know that miracles are not God's normal way of operating. If miracles were God's normal way of operating we would not need hospitals or doctors. All we would need is pastors to be with you everyday of the week and we would pray for you. It would just be like an assembly line and we can fix you all up just by saying prayers in the name of Jesus.

That would be nice but this is not how God normally operates. We read the Bible and you see that God works through people. As long as people can do a certain job that God would rather people do that job than God directly intervene. When there is no person to do the job God will sometimes step in and do something miraculous, otherwise God prompts our hearts and uses people.

I appreciate that about God. We also know that God uses natural

means and has established the laws of physics and science. God does not generally violate those, but he can, and sometimes does.

I personally have seen people who were miraculously healed. Neither I nor doctors could explain it any other way than that God somehow touched them and brought direct healing. We always pray for that because the Bible says that sometimes we don't have things because we don't ask for them. Now I can't explain this theologically, I just know there are some times when we ask God gives us a "yes" because God was waiting for us to ask. God waits to be invited and so we always ask.

God also works through doctors and nurses and health care providers and family members and friends. I thank God for the way God works. What I have seen over time is that when people are praying for those who are ill or suffering something happens. The happening isn't just God's miraculous intervention, but I think that somehow we are cooperating with God to touch that person ourselves by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We learned in physics that there is a particle over here and 100 miles away there is a particle that is affected by this particle right in front of you. I do understand that completely but somehow I think that may be like intercessory prayer. When we are praying for someone, we are giving something of ourselves to that person, and the Holy Spirit takes that and uses that on their behalf.

This is why we send prayer requests out via e-mail each week and ask you to pray for people. We believe that prayer matters for people who are sick because something happens as a result of that prayer.

Ultimately, only through prayer can we find God's peace. We open ourselves up to cooperate with God's healing touch.

SLIDE The significance of community.

Another area of faith which impacts our healing and health is the idea of community. People who are involved in worship or actively involved in church live longer and have healthier lives according to the most recent studies.

Dr. Andrew Newburg at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School led a study in this area. The average life expectancy of persons who do not attend church is 75. Those who attend church less than weekly have an average life expectancy of 80. Those who attend church once a

week have an average life expectancy of 82. Those who attend more than weekly, that is they come to worship and some other small group or study each week, have all average life expectancy of 84 years. That is nine years longer than the person who does not go to church. That is pretty significant.

Somehow being a part of a church family has an impact on your health and well-being. It has an impact in a variety of ways. Once more let's turn to our group of health professionals and see what they think is the connection between being a part of Christian community and long-term wellness.

VIDEO Medical Science-Christian Community.

SLIDE The significance of community.

When you show up for worship here at First United Methodist Church we receive some of those benefits. But the truth is that most you could not name most of the persons who were sitting around you right now. We greet each other as we come into worship and as we leave but that is not the same as bearing one another's burdens; praying for one another; caring for one another. That happens in a small group which is why we emphasize being involved in a group beyond worship here at First United Methodist Church.

You need a group of people who know your name. You need a group of people who will pray for you and hold you accountable to how you live your life. You need a group of people who will bear you up when you can't stand on your own. It is a privilege and wonderful to watch when someone goes through crisis in his church to see how their small group reacts. I've seen people stay the night with persons who have been ill. I have seen friends bring humor and laughter even as death approaches. That only happens when you are involved with a group of Christians at a more intimate level than what happens when you were in worship. You need that.

I got a call recently from someone who has been a member of this church for a very long time. But during the whole time they called this their church home they never once got involved in small group or study. They are now homebound and they can't get out. Because they were not a part of a small group there is no one who is even thinking about going to visit them every week. We organize a ministry to help send people to see this

person but it is not the same as being a part of the community so that people naturally will come and listen and hold your hand. It's different than having people who will come and sit with you and say, "Until you die, you are stuck with me. I am here for you."

That is what happens when we get involved in Christian community.

SLIDE A word to health care providers.

I want us to be aware of the role that doctors play in healing. Once again let's hear from Dr. Kip Boyd and Suzanne Bolton as they share with me the importance of the kind of person our health care providers can and should be.

VIDEO Medical Science-Doctors.

SLIDE A word to health care providers.

Let me say just a few words to our doctors and nurses and other health care providers in his church. There are many of you in this congregation. Let me read you an e-mail from one of them.

I pray for guidance before and during every surgery. I will lift up a silent prayer and I find it tremendously helpful. As example, last week I was performing an incredibly complex surgery and I had rehearsed the operation in my mind on multiple occasions before the procedure. I was convinced that I had all the details worked out, but as we got into the procedure no matter what I tried things just did not come together. I found my frustration level building and I finally said a silent prayer acknowledging that God was the giver of my surgical talents and that in God all things are possible. I prayed for God's guidance so that I might help this patient. Like so many times before, my frustration resolved and I experienced a new clarity and saw the solution to the task at hand. The solution had been staring me in the face for some time but God answered my prayers and led me through the rest of the operation in an incredibly successful way.

Let me ask a question so that the health-care providers can see your response. If you had the choice between a doctor who would pray like that while you were in surgery and one who did not pray and never talked to God, how many of you would rather have the doctor who prays for you while you were in surgery?

I would think that most of us would rather know that we have a doctor who says, "You know what? I don't have all the answers but I'm going to

use my best gifts and then let God help me to bring healing to this person."

Doctors and nurses and all health care providers—you are God's healing hands. You are amazing to me. You have been called to a profession where you get to do what Jesus did. He healed people. I can't do that like you can do that.

God called you to this, and when you have an opportunity to look at someone from a holistic perspective and say, "this is someone who has a soul, a mind and body and I have been invited into their lives to minister and to care for them."

When you pray for God to use you and you look at how you tend to these people in your care. Amazing things can happen. You bring together the incredible power of faith in the power of medicine in a very real and tangible way.

SLIDE A challenge to each of us about health and wholeness – I Corinthians 6:19-20

One challenge to all of us, whether we are health care providers or health-care recipients, is to take care of the bodies which have been given to us as gifts. The Bible says that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. That means that you are supposed to take care of it in a certain way and respect it as the amazing gift that is. Many of us don't take care of our bodies and that means we inflict upon ourselves and those who love us a shorter lifespan than we were meant to have.

We sin against God by what we do to our bodies. I do this all the time. I sin against God in my body by overheating, by failing to exercise appropriately, by trying to push my body too far and not getting enough rest, and when we do that we shorten our lifespan. If we shorten our lifespan, I think there will be a day that will come where we stand before the Lord and God says, "I was really counting on getting 10 more years out of you. But you did not take care of yourself, and I'm disappointed in that."

We are called to take care of our bodies and help the healing process.

I want to wrap up this part of the sermon by hearing one final word from those I interviewed this week. I asked them about the connection they see between prayer, faith, medicine and healing.

VIDEO Medical Science-Prayer.

Just think of it this way. What risk is there in prayer? There really is no risk and only potential gain—perhaps even nine years of additional life—and certainly a great quality of life.

SLIDE Conclusion: “Your Faith Has Made You Well...” – Luke 8:48

We conclude our sermon back at the seaside of Galilee. Jesus is walking through town and there are hundreds of people around him. As this throng surrounds him Jesus suddenly stops and he turns around and says, "Who just touched me?"

The disciples say, "You have to be kidding Jesus! There are hundreds of people here and most of them are touching you. What do you mean by asking who just touched you?"

Jesus says, "I felt power go out from me. Somebody just touched me. Who was it? Which of you just touched me? You know who you are."

This woman comes up very sheepishly. She says, "It was me. I did it. I have been sick for 12 years now. I have gone to every doctor that I can go to. I spent all of my money and trying to be made well and I have nothing left. I have had this bleeding and I can't even go to the synagogue because I am considered unclean from my hemorrhaging. I have no hope Jesus.

"I just thought to myself, 'If only I could touch the hem of your garment then maybe I would be made well.' And the moment I touched you Jesus I felt something. I think I have been made well."

Jesus turned to her and with a tenderness that we don't see hardly anywhere else in the Gospels, he actually uses the word daughter and says, "Daughter, go in peace. Your faith has made you well."

What an interesting thing that Jesus says. "Your faith has made you well."

I expect him to say something more like, "God has made you well." But instead he says, "Your faith has made you well." What does that mean?

I don't think it means what the faith teachers and TV evangelists sometimes say, "If you have enough faith that God will heal you. If you are not healed then you did not have enough faith."

This woman had almost no faith. She didn't know who Jesus was.

He was just a last chance. "Just maybe, maybe if I touch him I will be well." She had just enough faith to touch his garment.

It was not that she had a large quantity of faith, but it was just enough. Part of what this passage teaches us isn't that if we have enough faith that God will heal us supernaturally and miraculously. I think part of what this is saying is that, "When you've tried everything else—when there is nowhere else to turn to—and you turn to Jesus then he brings a wellness you can't find anywhere else."

You reach out and you touch him and you begin to find shalom. You begin to find wellness, wholeness and peace.

I've told this story before about Gary who was a parent of one of the kids in my first youth group. He had a daughter in eighth grade and twin girls who were six when he was diagnosed with cancer. Our church prayed for Gary every day in every Sunday for weeks on end. He was in a small group with several other parents in my youth group and they prayed with him each week. The cancer went into remission for about a year and then came back with a vengeance. I know that Gary want to live longer and see his daughters grow up and watch them graduate from high school and maybe someday get married, but he never got to do those things.

Gary went into hospice care and the first time I visited with him there I'll never forget what he said to me. He said, "Jeff I have no idea why all these people have surrounded me in prayer and love me. I don't think I can change the world because of my illness but maybe I can change the other people in this hospital wing. I don't know why God has brought you to this place but I know God has brought me here and he is not finished with the yet."

Gary came to church almost every week he was physically able until the Sunday before he died. One of the last times I talked with Gary was the day we shared communion together in his hospital room. This is what he said to me, "I realize today that all of things I thought were important before still really matter. The things that I took for granted are really the things I treasure. I wake up each day and I realize that I could spend a day complaining, or I could look for joy. I choose to look for joy."

Gary put his trust in Jesus. I think he probably lived longer because of all the help and care people gave him. I know he had a different quality of life and I know he found meaning in his suffering because of his faith in

Jesus.

This is the picture that I have in mind the day that he passed away. I picture in my mind Jesus looking at him and saying, "Son, your faith has made you well." And that is my hope for you. Would you pray with me?

While your heads are bowed and eyes are closed, I want to encourage you if you were here today and have never put your trust in Jesus—maybe you go to church every Sunday but you have never actually said, "Jesus I trust you with my life. I want to follow you and be yours no matter what happens." Today would be a great day to do that.

If you are here and maybe this is your first time to come to church a long time but perhaps God has been speaking to you today, then what do you have to lose? Stress? Anxiety? Sickness? What do you have to gain? Peace, joy, meaning, purpose—maybe years to your life. Maybe today would be the day you might say, "I choose faith. I choose Christ."

If you do I would invite you to say this prayer after me. You can to say quietly under your breath. "Thank you Jesus for accepting me. I trust you with my life. I want to be one of your followers. I accept you as my Savior. I choose to follow you as my Lord. Heal me. Bring me your shalom, your peace—in your holy name, amen."

Theme: Where Science and Religion Meet

"Medical Science and the Power of Faith"

Luke 8: 43-48

As Jesus went with him, he was surrounded by the crowds. 43 A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure.

44 Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of his robe. Immediately, the bleeding stopped.

45 "Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

Everyone denied it, and Peter said, "Master, this whole crowd is pressing up against you." 46 But Jesus said, "Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt healing power go out from me." 47 When the woman realized that she could not stay hidden, she began to tremble and fell to her knees before him. The whole crowd heard her explain why she had touched him and that she had been immediately healed. 48 "Daughter," he said to her, "your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

Introduction

I. Medical Science: The Body-Mind-Spirit Connection

- A. The aim of medical science
- B. What medical science is saying about the “faith factor”

II. Suffering, Sickness and God’s Will in the Christian Life

- A. How Christians view suffering – Romans 5:3-5
- B. The aim of the Christian life - sanctification
- C. God’s providence: God’s work and will for our lives – John 10:10

III. The Power of Faith: What Religion Brings to Wholeness

- A. The importance of trust – Philippians 4:6-7
- B. The power of hope
- C. The impact of prayer
- D. The significance of community

IV. Practicing Holistic Medicine, Living Holistic Lives

- A. A word to health care providers
- B. A challenge to each of us about health and wholeness – I Corinthians 6:19-

20

Conclusion: “Your Faith Has Made You Well...” – Luke 8:48

Study Guide

Monday, January 28 – Take a moment to look over your notes from yesterday’s sermon. What insights is medical science gaining about the connection between spirituality and health? Is the reverse also true – is there a connection between your spiritual health and your physical well-being? Does God care about what we do with our bodies and how well we take care of them? A number of passages in the Law of the Old Testament seemed to focus on ensuring the health of the people – scan Leviticus 13-15 to see this. What we do with our bodies – using them for God’s glory versus doing profane things with them, is clearly of interest within the scriptures. Some of these verses may guide us to consider how we should take care of our bodies in order to honor God. Read Romans 12:1. What are all of the implications for you of presenting your body as a living sacrifice to God? Read I Corinthians 6:19-20. In its context, these verses refer to abstaining from sexual immorality. But the idea has a broader application. If your

body is the temple in which God's spirit lives, and if you are not your own, but you belong to God, what are the implications of this for how well you take care of your body? If you are in poor physical health how is this likely to affect your spiritual life? How is it likely to affect your effectiveness in service to God? How will it affect the number of years you live, and God's purposes for your life? Are you currently exercising and taking care of yourself? If not, is God calling you to do so?

Tuesday, January 29 – Let's look at the scripture passage from Sunday's sermon – an interesting story of two healings, intertwined together. We will read the passage from Mark, rather than Luke's version which was read Sunday. Read Mark 5:21-43. Let's focus on the woman who had been hemorrhaging first. What do we learn about her in this story? How must she have felt? Do you think there are times today when medicine has done all it can do, and the only hope for healing is through Christ? What was Jesus sensing when he asked, "Who touched me?" When Jesus says, "Your faith has healed you" what do you think he means? Why was it her faith that Jesus mentions, rather than the power of God? What do the two stories – the woman and the little girl, tell us about Jesus? About the power of God? About the kind of healing that awaits us in heaven? If you are a healthcare professional, you are continuing the work of Jesus – how can you integrate your faith in your care for people's physical well being? How do you see the connection between spiritual health and physical health?

Wednesday, January 30 – Today we will look at some of the scriptures that help us understand the role of faith and trust in the release of anxiety and stress, and putting ourselves in a position to best receive healing. Read Philippians 4:4-7. Now, read it again aloud. A large amount of contemporary medical research has shown a connection between our ability to let go of fear, and our ability to heal. Read I Peter 5:7 – how do we cast our anxiety upon God? Read Matthew 6:28-34. What does this teach us about the perspective we are to have on our lives? About trusting in God? About our priorities? Use this passage as the basis for a conversation with God – inviting God to help you to follow the words of Jesus.

Thursday, January 31 – Read Proverbs 3:4-8. What does this passage teach us about where and when healing comes? Let's look at another healing story from the ministry of Jesus. Read Luke 5:17-26. Jesus is clear, elsewhere in the gospels, that sickness is not necessarily the result of sin. But in this particular passage sin is the issue. How do you think this man's sins – his internal spiritual life and his guilt – were keeping him paralyzed? Does sin in our lives ever lead to sickness or disease? In what ways is forgiveness a form of healing? Invite God to forgive you.

Friday, February 1 – The practice of anointing with oil and praying for the sick is grounded in the New Testament. Read James 5:13-16. Beginning February 20, we will offer anointing, prayer and communion at 10:15 a.m. each Sunday in the Wesley Covenant Chapel. What is healing and wholeness? Is it more than physical? Does our faith exempt us from becoming ill? What spiritual lessons have you learned through illness? When does our ultimate healing come? Be bold in praying for your needs, and be aware of the many ways God hears and answers our prayers. Read II Corinthians 4:5:9 where Paul gives us his perspective on our earthly bodies.

