

Year C, August 25, 2019  
11 Pentecost (Proper 16)  
Christ Church, Mexia

In the gospel lesson this morning Jesus heals on the Sabbath and the local religious leader takes exception to his violation of the rules. For some reason this story took me back over 50 years to the Ia Drang Valley in Vietnam. The 1st Bn, 7<sup>th</sup> US Calvary had landed there at the base of a mountain where they would be outnumbered 8-1 by battle-hardened North Vietnamese troops in the fighting that ensued almost immediately after they began to land. The fighting was fierce and in close proximity to the LZ, so subsequent helicopter landings were perilous – so much so that Medevac flights were ordered not to land there, even though the number of casualties were rising fast. But MAJ Bruce Crandall and his wingman, CPT Ed Freeman, who were flying unarmed Hueys and who had heard the orders, decided to make multiple trips into LZ X-Ray that day. They took out over 70 wounded soldiers, many of whom would not have survived otherwise. And on the return trips they delivered ammunition, water and other essentials to sustain those who were locked in their life or death struggle.

If you saw the movie, *We Were Soldiers*, you may recognize them by their nicknames, “Snake” and “Too Tall.” “Too Tall” was slightly miscast for the movie, as he appeared to be younger than he was. He had fought for two years in WWII in the Navy, and then switched to the Army for the Korean War. He was one of 14 survivors of the 257 souls who fought in the initial battle for Pork Chop Hill in that war. But his battlefield commission for that action allowed him to become a pilot later, which had been his dream – though he had to wait until height restrictions were eased – hence the nickname, “Too Tall.”. He had paid his dues, so to speak, but he sustained four more wounds that day in Vietnam because people were more important than orders, more important than personal safety. Ed is no longer with us, God rest his soul, but his example lives on. Snake, I believe is still living in Washington state. Fortunately, they were not admonished for their failure to obey the rules but were ultimately awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions.

Of course, you should know by now how Jesus generally stands regarding “rules,” especially when they conflict with easing the burden of someone. People’s needs and dignity take precedence over rules!

There are several other points about this story that I find interesting as well. First, the woman didn't ask to be healed. Think about it. She walked in, as best she could, and "when Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." It is like the story of the widow of Nain. Everything I know about Jesus makes me think he was compassionate and wanted to alleviate suffering, when and where he could. And that's good news for us. Jesus has shown an inclination to heal us, even when we don't ask. Maybe even when we think we don't need to be healed, because we are so good, so in control, so much better than the rest of the folks... Why would we ask for healing in those circumstances? I'm pretty sure that God has healed me in ways for which I didn't ask, but desperately needed. And goodness knows, there's a lot more to be done. I am after all, like all of us, a work in progress. But I have hope and faith that it will happen, even if I can't, for some reason or another, articulate the request myself. That's a good feeling!

And another good sign is that the woman's healing depended neither on her faith nor the faith of others. Jesus is not selective in whom he heals – it's not about deserving – it's about grace.

Think about this for a moment. Social order rules are often to keep certain groups down and/or to keep certain groups in power. Prof. Rodney Sadler uses the following example: "Reflecting on religious practices in the slaveholding South, Frederick Douglass notes: 'It was necessary to keep our religious masters at St. Michael's unacquainted with the fact that, instead of spending the Sabbath in wrestling, boxing, and drinking whiskey, we were trying to learn how to read the will of God; for they had much rather see us engaged in those degrading sports, than to see us behaving like intellectual, moral, and accountable beings.'" To do so would have been a threat to that mid-1800s social system. And sadly, we see a rise in white nationalist supremacy today. So, Jesus is doing more than healing and challenging rules. He is showing us that attending to persons in need is at the heart of the gospel – the mission of the church, for example. And he sheds more light into what the kingdom of God looks like – no brokenness, no conflicts, no domination by some groups over others, no one left out (who wants to be in).

Sometimes we are afraid to go against the rules, not just because it can result in physical danger to us, like Ia Drang, but because it makes us different, possibly setting us in conflict with others – or maybe even with previously held values and ideas of our own. So, let me close with some words from Br. Nicholas Bartoli, SSJE: "We might

feel, somewhere so deep inside that we're not conscious of it, that we can be at peace only if we feel safe enough in the world. And so we spend a great deal of energy searching for a safety we can never find. We can never find it, because the search itself distracts us from the truth: the only safety that will ultimately satisfy us, resting in God's embrace, is already ours." Take heart. Don't worry. Be free to act.

William Temple once said: "It is a great mistake to think that God is chiefly interested in religion." God is interested in the kingdom – justice, peace, love – and we should be as well. So, we've got to find a way to be empowered in systems that too often seek to convince us that there is nothing we can do, except go along with what our leadership tells us. Jesus told us the kingdom is near, and he showed us what we needed to do to bring it here on earth. That is what we should joyfully be doing.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.