

## God our healer

Mark 5:21-43

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O LORD my God, I cried out to you, and you restored me to health. You brought me up, O LORD, from the dead; you restored my life as I was going down to the grave. (Psalm 30)

Hardly anything in our life is so important as our health and the health of family, children, and friends. We have one life only and it is so great to grow old, and to do so in body that works fine. If this is what the Lord our God gives us, we must thank him for this blessing, because 'health' is not normal.

Worldwide many children and adults suffer from a lack of basic healthcare, and this is often in countries where people are plagued by diseases. Here in Egypt, Bilharzia, Hepatitis C and Diabetes are just some of the very prevalent diseases. What a pain we see around us...

God is the powerful Creator of life, and the one who lovingly sustains his creation. But this seems to be so difficult to combine with the actuality of suffering all over the world.

I am not so interested to speak about suffering *in the world* or in *general* terms, but in these few minutes I'd rather focus on suffering *in our own* life, the burdens we carry through life.

The most existential question we have in times of need and crisis is usually: Why does this misery happen *to me*? *Why me*?

### 1 Why?

- Why did my parents have a stillborn child?
- Why did my father die when I was 13?
- Why did my most popular uncle die when he was only 65 or so?
- Why did one of my female friends from primary school die a few weeks ago from cancer?

Easy answers to this 'why me' question are deeply suspect. I do not think they even exist – except of course if the health-problem is clearly our own doing. If I drink 5 liters of beer each day, I know why I get liver problems.

The question of the 'why' and the 'why me' is very complicated, as it addresses and involves God, the Creator. 'Why do you let this happen?' We cannot deny that our loving Creator, in one way or another, does have something to do with the good things *and the bad things* that happen to us.

But if we say that He wanted all things, even evil in our lives, we make him into the author of ugliness, it seems.

If we say that He has nothing to do with evil in our lives, as if even that He is overwhelmed by

it, we make him into a caricature of the Creator. God, standing at the sideline of our life, powerless. Neither choice is consistent with what we know of the character of God.

The Christian faith teaches that we can know God and his character in the face of Jesus Christ. If we want to know him, and if we desire to know how God relates to our suffering, we must therefore look at Jesus.

That steers us away from approaching the issue of God and evil from a theoretical perspective; it takes us to God in his very concreteness, as incarnated in Jesus Christ.

What we have is Jesus and his life on earth – in which he fully reflected the will and the love of God his Father. And in his life, Jesus showed God's great interest in meeting human needs.

We have read of Jairus, the head of the synagogue in Capernaum. The good man had a sick daughter – a child he loved dearly. She was dying actually, and listen to the tender words of Jairus: 'My little daughter is sick'. What an *affection and anxiety* we hear in those words. 'My little child is dying...'

A few hours later, Jairus could feast – the presence of God through Jesus Christ changed the situation – his daughter who had died, was alive again.

This was an event in history, in time and space, not some mythology. Mark wrote his Gospel, according to many scholars, not later than 15 or 20 years after the death of Christ. When he described Jairus, head of the synagogue of Capernaum, his readers had little difficulty to verify the story. The man was a well-known leader in a famous city in Israel. And there were lots of witnesses.

So Mark presented his readers with a verifiable historical event. It may be hard to believe that Jesus did raise a girl from the dead. But St Augustine said:

If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don't like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself.

Take the miracles out of the Bible, and we have not much left.

Do you not know, in your own environment, people who were about to die – but God called them back from the grave as you and others prayed for them?

We can probably all testify to those moments when a child was very sick, or a friend, or maybe you, and you prayed your heart out – and the

person was healed again...

But we are interesting beings. When we are almost ready to call a miracle a miracle, immediately questions come to our mind, and maybe this has to do with our upbringing, or our educational systems.

We immediately try to create a philosophical system in our mind that tries to answer all questions that we have related to this issue of God and healing.

We want systems, logic.

If God is indeed love and able to heal people, why then that child that died, or this friend who has been suffering from a dreadful disease for years? Or the young person we prayed so much for in church and he passed away...

I do not pretend to have answers to the question of *why* this is... but the fact that we do not have an answer, and the reality that many prayerful people become sick and die, *should not lead us to stop from testifying to what we also see: God does heal people.*

## **2 Healing**

We all get all sorts of diseases, illnesses in our life, and most of the time, we are healed from those again. The Creator who made our bodies is involved in this in *one way or another*.

Or do you think it is just nature? Fate? Chance? Good luck? As God is the creator and sustainer of life, it seems reasonable to thank him for all blessings in our life, including our health.

God is the one who knows your body, who knows your mind, and who is able to make your life all right. And sometimes he does that in a rather spectacular manner. In those moments, when the healing is spectacular, we usually do not forget to thank him for it.

And even if we have not seen supernatural, miraculous events, we must certainly not forget to recognize the hands of God in the hands of the doctors that serve us.

God has created the possibility for radiation therapy, and chemical substances that are given as medicine. He made mankind clever to produce very sharp knives, and minute drills to save us from dreadful toothaches...

We often do not see the provision of God in all this – but we should. There is no contradiction between God's direct intervention in healing people, or medical doctors applying their wisdom and God-created medicine. God seldom works immediately, he uses human beings as his mediators, to be his hands – and this includes the area of healing in times of sickness.

So when doctors are involved, we must also pray to God for healing, and thank him for his gift of health. In the end, the doctors can only do their bit... God has to make the body function

again, or make the wound grow together.

The woman in the text from St Mark that we have read, found out that doctors are not the ones that give health. She had gone to many, one after the other. That poor woman must have been paying her wallet empty and praying her heart out, 'God, heal me, use the doctors', but nothing has worked and she was broke.

Because she suffered from continuous bleeding for 12 years, she must have so often wondered: "Why me, why does God not save me from this disaster."

In her case, the problem was even aggravated because her disease made her religiously unclean. She was not able to go to the temple or to the synagogue; that was forbidden by Jewish law. Not only was she awfully sick, but she also felt very far away from God.

God often does not give us what we ask from him. And sensitive people as we are, it is very easy to then think that something must be wrong with us. "Why am I sick? Why does God not answer my prayers? Have I done something wrong? Is he punishing me with this?"

But the reality that good Christians, good people, get sick and sometimes die before we think they should, must not surprise us. St Paul speaks of his thorn in the flesh – many Bible commentators think that he had an eye disease. They base this on a verse in Paul's letter to the Galatians, in which he says: "See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand." (Gal 6:11)

Tertullian, our own North African church father, believed Paul suffered from pain in the ear or head; others argue that Paul may have suffered from malarial fevers. We cannot be sure, but it is clear in Paul's life, he suffered a lot.

A great servant of God, who did not have a gloriously healthy and strong life. Three times he had prayed to God that he would be healed, but three times God made clear to him: 'my grace is enough for you, I will not change your situation. I will not heal you.'

And our Lord Jesus Christ, he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane for being saved from the pains and sufferings of the cross. In spite of those prayers, we know what happened.

Both examples show us that suffering, pain, disease, are not a sign of rejection by God, or that he is not interested in us. The sufferings of Paul and of Jesus Christ actually show that these problems *may serve a goal*.

Does your suffering, your sickness, serve a goal? Again, often we just do not know.

## **3 Be with me**

But I do dare to say, if in the midst of our problems we do not learn, if we do not come closer to

God through our circumstances, then we have certainly missed a chance to let our circumstances be a positive force in our life.

It is good to be reminded of what Jairus actually asked of Jesus.

- Give me a lecture on God's wisdom and how we can learn something even in difficult times?
- A sermon that says: 'You must have done something wrong, therefore God punishes you? That was how the friends of Job responded to his misery.'
- Is Jairus asking for a medical explanation?

No, Jairus does not need all that. He simply said to Jesus: "Come". This is what Jairus began with. "Come. Come in my home, and then, lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live."

Jairus started with saying: "Come". In times of great misery, the presence of God through Jesus Christ is the best we can aim for, and after we have invited him into our situation, he may act by healing, directly, or through medicine, or he may not. But in all cases, whether we are healthy or not, Jesus Christ is the presence of God to comfort us and to be with us.

There is nothing more comforting in life, and nothing that can create such change, as the presence of God through Jesus Christ.

'Jesus, come into my life, in my house, in my family, and be with us, and make us whole.'

The woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years went to Jesus, and touched him.

This is the clear biblical advice for how to act when in troubles of health or whatever: Let us make God our refuge. Let us invite Jesus Christ to come and be in our house, in our life.

Prayer means on the one hand, asking him to intervene in your need. But it is also, and I believe it is in the first place, being close to God.

In the midst of problems, hold on to him and know: 'Even though I really do not understand, even though I am upset and maybe angry about the situation - God my Father is with me in the midst of my misery.'

And even louder than our cry: "Lord come into my misery"... and even preceding our cry for him to come, Jesus calls us:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Mathew 11:28)

God invites us to come with our needs. He does not offer answers. He offers us himself.

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.