

For Power Came Out From Him and Healed All of Them

Luke 6:17-26

February 13, 2022

“And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.”

In the winter of 2017 I was invited to attend a Lunar ceremony at the Turtle Lodge Centre for Indigenous Education at Sagkeeng First Nation. Steve Heinrichs and I had been trying to secure a time to sit down with Turtle Lodge's then main Elder Dave Courchene for an interview. He agreed to sit down with us on one condition: that we come to the centre on the full moon as guests for their monthly lunar ceremony. For thousands of years, Anishinaabe people across Turtle Island have structured their lives around the lunar cycle. Seeing how the moon regulates the waters and tides, stabilizes the earth's position, and even impacts the rhythms of our creaturely bodies, the Full Moon ceremony is a way for Anishinaabe people to resituate their lives in relation to the moon and become open to its healing movements.

Courchene wanted us to come as this was also a ceremony where the women of Sagkeeng were the main leaders. He said to us that people always wanted to talk with him, and that it was his responsibility to make sure that other voices were heard as well. And so he wanted us to come this day to get a better sense of who the community that gathers at Turtle Lodge actually is. This ended up being a ceremony that I am still grappling with today.

We came into the main hall of the lodge - a room that is very similar to the main hall at Thunderbird House here in Winnipeg. It is a circular room that holds the familiar smells of sweet grass and tobacco. At the centre of the hall was a drum circle around which were three different circles of chairs. The innermost circle was for elders and other community leaders. The middle circle was for community members. The outer circle was for guests. It was this outer circle where Steve and I sat.

There was plenty of chatter in the room as we all took our seats. Eventually Dave Courchene stood up to welcome everyone to the ceremony and invited the women leading us to begin. A number of women then proceeded to the very centre of the circle, surrounded first by the drums and then the rest of us. All the lights went out and the room was completely

dark and silent. I couldn't even see my hand in front of my face. I immediately became anxious and did not know what would come next.

First the drums, loud and pounding in the rhythm of a heartbeat. Then the voices, the women at the centre were singing an honour song. Then quick and intense flashes of lights appeared all over the room - people were lighting tobacco. And finally the smell - the smoke from the tobacco was filling my body as I breathed to the rhythm of the drum. It was an intense experience that lasted for over an hour. And by the end of the ceremony my anxiety was completely gone and a deep sense of being healed came over me. There was calmness and joy in the room. The lights came on, and all of a sudden I noticed a huge table full of food. A meal had been prepared for us to enjoy together. We ended the evening by having a feast.

"For power came out from him and healed all of them." Since this day I have struggled with what to do with this event. Clearly something happened that day that reoriented how I lived my life. Something stabilized in me that carried me forward in new and good ways. I was healed from something and for something. But I have never really had the logic, the words, or even the practices to help me fully understand what all went on that day. This was not a ceremony for me in so many ways. And yet I received something that night that allowed for healing to happen within me.

The best I can do really, is see in this experience a reminder of how there is a power at play in this life that I can never fully claim to control or understand. I was caught up in something that night that far exceeded my abilities to fully control or even understand it. And it was precisely this lack of control that opened me up to be healed.

It brought me alongside the Disciples of Jesus gathered on the mountain in Galilee listening to him preach. I realize how dangerous that statement is. And I do say it with some trepidation. I do not want to imply here that the gathering at Turtle Lodge was in some way a Christian service dressed up in Indigenous practices. Rather, what I am saying is that my own tradition is the one out of which I can make some sense of situations like these. What I read in passages like the one just read from Luke 6 helps me situate these experiences in good ways.

We once again find ourselves being led in worship by Jesus preaching the Beatitudes. And I have to admit, this tends to be a text I do not enjoy

preaching on all that much. The risk for us Mennonites to read this text, and get it profoundly wrong is high. We like to view ourselves as the Christian traditions that takes the teachings of Jesus seriously. And for good reason. Discipleship remains a core element of our faith. But sometimes we become too certain of ourselves in this. We, more than most other Christian denominations, have a deep understanding of how best to live into Jesus' infamous sermon. In Luke 6:17-26 we find a detailed program laid out by Jesus that allows us to be certain about what the Christian life entails. As Mennonites we have worked hard on putting this program into action. And thus, we are *the* experts on passages like this.

But there is a fatal flaw in this approach. It misses the significance of verse 19. Luke begins his account of the beatitudes by showing Jesus in a vulnerable, even slightly out of control state. As the crowds gather around him power comes out of him and all are healed. It is a subtle phrase, but a significant one. It does not say Jesus unleashes a power on everyone and they are healed. It says power came out of him and they were healed. Something exceeds from him that he does not have the ability to control. It leaves him and acts independently of him.

And it is from here, this fragile and vulnerable state, where Jesus then begins to teach. Part of the point Luke is trying to make in this passage is that our habits and practices remain marked by a power that exceeds them. We can indeed work towards the creation of practices and rituals that help form us into good citizens of God's reign. But these ought never to be seen as finalized as uncontestable. Something always remains at work among us that is out of our control.

Now, you may be wondering if I am making too much of a few words. And perhaps I am. But it is striking to me how Luke uses this same phrase elsewhere in his Gospel when describing the healing ministries of Jesus. We find it in Luke 5 where Jesus heals the paralytic. Jesus is sitting with his followers and a group of Pharisees and, as it says in vs. 17 "The power of the Lord was with him to heal". Luke uses a slightly different wording here, but the point remains the same - a power was with Jesus that exceeded his ability to control it. It was not fully his. The way Luke tells it, we get the sense that this power is one that need not remain with Jesus. It could leave him at any time. In this state the paralytic is brought to Jesus through the roof and he is healed.

We then find it again in Luke 8 when Jesus heals the hemorrhaging woman. At this point in the story of Jesus the crowds around him were swelling. Word had gone around about the signs and wonders being committed by this man from Galilee and people were desperate to see him. As the crowds pressed themselves on him a woman who had been suffering from 12 years of hemorrhages touched Jesus' clothes and she was healed. Jesus' response is found in 46 when he says "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." Again, Jesus is presented as unable to fully control the power that resides with him. He had no specific intention to heal this woman. In fact, she was healed more by her own actions and what it caused to happen to him, than anything Jesus himself does. It is a truly remarkable text. Once again a power comes out of Jesus in uncontrollable ways and people are healed. Reading these two texts next to Luke 6:19 leads me to believe that this is a very intentional strategy of the Gospel writer. The writer of Luke-Acts presents to us a Jesus that, in spite of all he does, is never fully in control of what his life does to others. A power comes from him that even he cannot fully handle.

When I think of Jesus in this text my mind begins to imagine Jesus as a musician. The relationship between a musician and their music is structured in a similar fashion as Jesus and his power to heal. When you create music, there comes a time when you must hand it over to others. Music is created to be heard. But how others receive the music cannot be fully controlled by those who create it. The music a musician makes can cause us to dance, to enter a state of bliss, to laugh, to cry, to be irritated, angry, joyful. It can incite in people any number of emotions and reactions. And once this starts happening, what the performer does can certainly shape people's responses, but it can never fully control them. Something remains out of the musicians grasp. Music is a reminder that, no matter how certain we are about who we are and how we wish to live, there remains the possibility of being opened up to something new. We are never fully in control of how our lives impact those around us.

Coming back to the Luke texts, there is one key part of all of this that I want to make clear. Luke presents Jesus with a power that he cannot control, so that the circles around him may expand. The power that goes out from him is one that heals, and brings people into communion with each other. In Luke 5 the paraplegic is healed, begins to walk and proclaims the glory of God. In our text for today the power goes out from Jesus and heals

everybody such that they are ready to gather around him and learn. And then finally, in Luke 8 a woman who was very much being discriminated against (in those times any woman who was hemorrhaging like her would have been deemed unclean and unfit for regular human contact), is healed and brought back into her community. When Jesus encounters a closed circle, a power goes out from him that breaks through it, such that it may expand and welcome those previously disregarded.

This is how I would like us to read the beatitudes. Not as a close circle of rules and regulations that give us the confidence that we are living the true and righteous life. Rather these are an invitation to see our life as one that is structured, but still fragile and contestable. A power remains working to bring people in, expanding our circle so that all may be healed.

I experienced the power of this uncontrolled life at Turtle Lodge. And I am sure many of you can think of times in your own lives where you have experienced the same. Our task, then, becomes one of seeking to live life attentive to the power that comes from Jesus. We are to recognize that the unsettled and out-of-control state of creaturely life is not a fatal flaw. It is an opening, an invitation to imagine better futures for all. The way things are need not be the way they remain.

Right now it feels like such a task is becoming more and more difficult to embark on. There is so much noise in our world right now working to silence the beautiful openings Jesus gestures towards in his sermon in Luke 6. From truckers blaring their horns non-stop frustrated with the limits being imposed on them, but turning to even worse alternatives as a response, to the continued (and completely related) rise of white supremacy across the western world, to the emergent (and also completely related) potential for war in Ukraine and Bosnia, there is much in this life that is causing us to miss the continued presence of Jesus' power to heal. Hearing these noises, let us not lose heart - Jesus remains with us, and with him comes the power to heal. Amen.