

## "Always Healing"

Texts: Psalm 147:1-11, 20c  
Mark 1:29-39

Preached: 2/8/15  
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When Jesus was around there was always healing. I imagine anyone who spent any time with him, following him, listening to him preach, watching him interact with people – must have multiple images in their head of Jesus healing.

We saw last week Jesus' casting out of a demon in worship, certainly a healing act, not only for the man possessed, but surely for the entire congregation. This week we see Jesus after the worship service. He has left the synagogue. He seeks retreat in the house of Simon. There are only a few disciples with him. Entering the house he finds a very sick lady, Simon's mother-in-law.



She had been bed-ridden by a fever. What did Jesus do. He healed her, of course. He took her hand and she immediately got up. Her healing is demonstrated by her ability to serve the men who had come to her house – they were probably hungry, after the long worship service.

Her serving is exactly what Jesus calls for from all disciples. Ironically, the male disciples don't seem to notice, or give her credit. They never comment, taking her healing and her service for granted.

Later in Mark, the disciples James and John will ask Jesus for power, for the honored seats to his right and to his left. They will have forgotten the lesson here, of Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus will say then to James and John, what Simon's mother-in-law knew immediately. That is: *whoever wants to be first, must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* With this brief healing at Simon's house we get also a teaching.



A second scene takes place later that evening, and in contrast to the first scene this one is quite public. ("The whole city was gathered at the door of the house.") They brought the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus...and he cured many. Jesus is becoming a celebrity, sought out for his power to heal. It seems he is always healing.

A third and final vignette happens the next morning, and implicitly refers back to the previous scene. Simon wants Jesus to remain in town and attend to even more residents of Capernaum, who are insisting on Jesus the Healer doing what he can obviously do. Yet Jesus is moving on. The conflict between Jesus and the leader of his disciples shows that Jesus' true purpose is misunderstood.

There is no comprehension of Jesus' overall mission. Jesus seeks a deserted place for prayer, but is hunted down by the disciples and the crowd. Even though everyone is searching for Jesus, he will not give in to their pleading. He moves instead toward other towns in Galilee so that he may resume his task of proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

Jesus seems to reject the opportunity to do more healing. Yet everywhere he goes there will always be healing. While he carries the power of God, he is not merely a miracle worker. While His healing demonstrates his power, it does not reveal who he is, ultimately. Jesus came to preach the Gospel and to challenge the power of evil.



However good and pleasant and popular it may have been for him to heal ever larger quantities of people, Jesus knew his true vocation was more than that. The healings themselves do not conflict with his calling, but the misunderstanding of them gets in the way of his message.

Jesus may have been tempted to miracle-working for all the fame he earned from it, but he understood that he was sent to announce the kingdom of God. He knew that only in the context of this proclamation did the power of healing gain its true meaning.

There are modern day healers – and their healing comes in different forms. A therapist who specializes in working with the very old described a typical nursing home she had visited:



The residents were all sitting half dead in their wheelchairs, mostly paralyzed and just existing, they didn't really seem responsive.

Their days consisted of watching some television, but if you asked them what they had watched they probably would not have been able to tell you. We brought in a young woman, a dancer, and told her to bring beautiful, old-fashioned music.

She brought in Tchaikovsky CDs and began to dance among those old people, all in their wheelchairs, which had been arranged in a circle. In no time the residents started to move. One old man stared at his own hand and said, "Oh, my God, I haven't moved this hand in ten years." And the oldest of the group, a woman who was 104-years-old, exclaimed in a thick German accent, "That reminds me of when I danced for the Tsar of Russia!"



This is more than merely a story of an effective therapy, but a demonstration of healing – how life and vigor can minister to long-neglected people and lifeless situations. I think it shows, in a small way, the kind of impact Jesus must have had on those around him!

It also shows that healing is not so difficult or unreachable as we might assume. I have a personal story to that effect, an experience that still speaks to me, even though it happened more than 25 years ago.

I was a young seminary student in Atlanta, Georgia serving an internship at the VA Hospital. It was an old, dreary facility with old, dreary people. I dreaded going there every day. I had to go from room to room, introduce myself as a chaplain and ask if the patient had spiritual needs and wanted prayer. It was brutal. Many of the residents were overtly rude, swearing at me and refusing me even entrance into the room. The ones who did let me pray seemed to just be tolerating my presence and were relieved when I left them. I was relieved, too.

In the beginning I despaired that healing was not possible in such a God-forsaken place. Of course I gradually realized I was completely mistaken – that not only was God present, but it wasn't me who brought this presence.



My first inkling of this happened on a visit to a particularly lifeless old man. Even the nurses had prepped me that this guy was unresponsive...that I could talk to him and pray for him, but he would not acknowledge my presence. I needed to speak up, though, because he was hard of hearing.

I leaned over his bed and began my monologue. I don't remember what I said. I know I prayed and was thinking it was time to dismiss myself, when out of the blue, the old man laying there motionless said, "Hey, do that again." I was startled. "Excuse me, I said, what did you say?" "Do that again," he said, "that thing with your lip, how your whiskers stand up, I've never seen that before." I continued to struggle with comprehension. Was I dreaming? I looked the man in the eye. He was smiling. "What?" I asked again.

He explained that the whiskers on my lower lip kept flinging out when I talked. I told him no one had ever noticed that before. He said he liked it, laughed a little, and thanked me for my prayer. We went on to have a delightful conversation and he invited me back.

I visited him many more times before my internship was over. I'm quite sure he was more healing to me than I was to him. He taught me not to assume that people were lifeless, just because they appeared so, or because some medical person had labeled them so. Healing is possible...always possible. In fact, where God is there is always healing.

The Psalmist sings of God's healing ways:  
The LORD builds up Jerusalem;  
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.  
He heals the broken-hearted,  
and binds up their wounds...

The LORD lifts up the downtrodden...



Jesus said his main purpose in coming out was to preach. But the people wanted him to heal. Even when he tried to retreat to get a break and find some quiet for prayer – his disciples interrupted him with the message “everyone is searching for you.” Wherever he journeyed, they brought to him the sick. He kept preaching, but even so he was always healing.

Healing was a major part of his ministry and his message. I imagine it to be a major part of ours, too.

We talk a lot about mission, service, worship, Christian Education...but not so much about healing. We leave the healing to others, to doctors, therapists, practitioners.



We imagine modern healing outside the church:

Maybe it happens through some avante garde music, certainly not church music.

Maybe it might come through some alternative medical procedure...like acupuncture, but not through our own touch.

Maybe through deep tissue massage at some expensive spa, but not through deep and caring spiritual conversation.

It might come through eating the right foods, seasoned with particular herbs, but not through a fellowship meal or through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Maybe through some Eastern practice of deliberate movement like Tai Chi, but not through our own moves of compassion and care.

Of course all these things are good and positive and contribute to healing. But there is healing to be shared in each one of us!

**How are we to be healers?** Are we to find lepers and cleanse them? Certainly we do not imagine ourselves having the power to cast out many demons. But wait a minute...maybe we do have power.

Maybe we don't think of our gift as healing, but perhaps we should. What if we changed our thinking and adjusted our perspective? What if we remembered that when Jesus was around there was always healing? Jesus is still around!

Your words and interactions with others can be healing? You can speak a healing word. Try it. With you children, your spouse, your neighbor, your friend. Listen to them. Don't ignore their needs, nor turn your back on their hurt. Be quiet first and when you speak, speak with love and care and acceptance and gentleness. Speak with solace and forgiveness.

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How can you be a healing presence? You have it in you. You have Jesus don't you? You have the power to consider in every situation: What is the healing thing, the healing word, the healing gesture?

What better way to announce the Kingdom of God than committing to be a healing presence. When Jesus was around there was always healing. Jesus is still around!