

“We Offer Healing”

Mark 1:29-39

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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We’re going to play a little word association. You know how this works. I’m going to say a word and ask you to respond with or pay attention to the first thing that comes to mind. Are you ready?

So, here’s my word - Healing.

What word came to mind for you?

Perhaps it was - doctor.

Maybe you first thought of the name of some illness or ailment that you or someone you love has suffered from.

Maybe it was a phrase that came to mind, maybe a simple and vulnerable, “Yes, please.”

Perhaps “prayer” was the word that you first thought of.

Or maybe it wasn’t a word as much as a feeling - hope, confidence, or perhaps skepticism.

As people who most commonly associate healing with the curing or treatment of medical conditions, which means we often think of healing connected to our doctors and medications, we sometimes forget how much of Jesus’ ministry was about this very thing.

Many of us are more likely to think of Jesus as a preacher or a teacher. We often remember things that we are told he said. Or, we are more likely to think of the relationships he built and the people he came in contact with, the ways that he cared for them. Sometimes, we are more likely to think of his purpose as being about saving souls rather than healing bodies, minds, and hearts.

And yet the gospels are full of healing stories.

And today’s reading is no exception. In it we hear about the impact of Jesus’ healing power on one specific individual, Peter’s mother-in-law. *And* we hear how crowds were gathering, how person after person sought Jesus out because of his ability to cure diseases and cast out demons.

So, we read these healing stories even as we tend to be a people who want to understand. We want to know how things happen. Even if we don’t fully understand, we want to be able to trust the effectiveness of the method, and often for us as modern people that means to trust the science.

So, while we may even sit comfortably with stories of Jesus healing people, many of us have a healthy level of suspicion toward the idea of someone being healed through a touch, through a prayer, through the mere presence of another person nearby. Many of us have rolled our eyes upon

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hearing reports of healing services where people were pushed forward to the pastor in a wheelchair and then left able to walk.

And meanwhile, even with that skepticism, we are still people who pray, often as a first response, when we hear of an illness, a diagnosis, or an accident. We pray, even as we make appointments with physicians, believing that there *is* a power beyond our understanding that just might be able to help.

And so, while we may not understand what happened in these stories...while we may even sometimes want to explain them away...while I would always encourage us to think critically about what we read in scripture...still, there is room for us to embrace the mystery of God's healing power.

As a pastor it has been my privilege to sit with people through some of the most wonderful and the most challenging times in their lives. I have prayed with and for people, even when I wasn't sure if my prayers mattered. I have been asked to pray for things I didn't think possible. I have seen healing happen, even when it wasn't always the healing that was asked for.

And as I have reflected on these experiences and let them commingle with my theology, here is what I have come to understand:

- In some mysterious way, the power and presence of God does make a difference. That doesn't always mean that God works in a way where we see the immediate cure we asked for. But, God is an ever present companion, and God is love.
- Healing is often more complex than we acknowledge. While we might think of it most often with physical needs, healing is not only about the body, but also about the heart, the mind, the soul. And these are rarely disconnected from each other.
- I am also aware that we often talk about what we are healed from or healed of - we want that cancer gone or that wound healed, but we are not only healed from things, we are often healed for things. As David Lose reflected, "What did the man from whom the unclean spirit was cast out a week ago do after his healing? What did all the people Jesus heals in this week's story do once they are freed from the various ailments of mind, body, and spirit that had captivated them? Some, I imagine, were simply so grateful to be made well – so grateful, that is, that they had been freed from something debilitating or destructive – that they returned as quickly as possible to their old lives and routines and relationships. But some, I'm willing to bet, including Simon's mother-in-law, recognize that they weren't only freed from something, they were also freed *for* something, for lives of purpose and meaning and service and generosity and more" ([Epiphany 5 B: Freedom For | ...In the Meantime \(davidlose.net\)](http://davidlose.net)).
- I also believe that it is God's desire that we experience fullness of life, and that comes in many forms. But it is always what healing leads us toward, whether it is an ability to live our lives longer and more physically able, whether it is an ability to love or forgive more fully, whether it is being healed from the struggles of this world in order to live in the mystery of God's eternal presence, because that can be healing, too.
- And I believe that we are partners in God's healing work. I have never laid my hands on someone and magically seen their body change or their abilities be returned, and yet I will

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continue to lay hands on people and pray that healing will come in whatever ways they need it. I will continue to sit with people in their pain and to walk with them toward the future that is theirs. I will continue to invoke the name of God in the midst of all of this because I believe that God wills fullness of life for all of us.

Friends, as followers of Jesus, we are called to offer healing.

How we do that might not look like how we picture this story from Mark's gospel. But that doesn't mean that we don't offer healing.

We may do so by sitting in silence, simply bearing witness to the pain and grief of another.

We may do so by delivering a meal, offering nourishment and an affirmation of someone's humanity even as we take one task off their to-do list.

We may offer healing as we share resources and fight injustices in order to help others start with a level playing field and have access to all they need to be well.

We may offer healing as we honor the life, not only of our human family, but of all creation around us.

We may offer healing with a hug, a prayer, a note, a conversation.

Healing doesn't only happen in one way or through one person. But together, as those who continue the work of Jesus in this world, we are invited to pay attention, to listen, to see, and to love that the ways that we live and the work that we do may be work that heals the world.

I invite you to receive a blessing written by Jan Richardson. It is titled, "And All Be Made Well" and it is a blessing for you to receive and to share.

That each ill
be released from you
and each sorrow
be shed from you
and each pain
be made comfort for you
and each wound
be made whole in you

that joy will
arise in you
and strength will
take hold of you
and hope will
take wing for you
and all be made well ([Epiphany 5: That All Be Made Well « The Painted Prayerbook](#)).

Amen.