

Jesus Heals ... still

by Rev. Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne

Church of the Palms

8-25-13

Luke 13:10–17

¹⁰Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' ¹³When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, 'There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.' ¹⁵But the Lord answered him and said, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?' ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Prayer of Illumination

Now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Introduction

I have decided to be a courageous preacher today. I will boldly go where no man – at least not Steve or Bruce – has gone before – at least within the last 11 months. I will go where angels fear to tread. This is a circus town so imagine short me in my preacher's robe stepping out on a verbal tightrope. In addition, there is no net but the kindness of your ears to hear what I mean - not necessarily what I manage to say.

I am being courageous today because I want to talk about Jesus' healing miracles. And, I want to talk about the ones we read in the Bible AND the ones today. Jesus heals ... still. And, since I am going to talk about Jesus healing today, I also have to address the times Jesus doesn't heal in the manner we would like. I need you to listen

carefully because I am going to tread way beyond the level of my wisdom ... but not beyond the reach of our faith.

Luke 13:10-17 Story of woman who was crippled

Our story today, about Jesus healing the woman who was crippled, is a wonderful illustration of Jesus' compassion leading to merciful action. Luke tells us Jesus is in the synagogue. Jesus sees a woman who is so crippled she cannot stand straight.

Illus. In one of the churches I served I met and became friends with a woman named Sharon who had a similar condition. Sharon had been a tall woman in her better years but now was unable to straighten her hips so that she always had to walk with the help of a cane. She was permanently bent over with her upper body and face almost parallel to the ground. When she was standing she could not easily see the faces of those around her. She could sit straight but not stand straight.

What healing miracles teach us

The story of Jesus healing the woman who was crippled is one of 18 healing stories in the Gospel According to Luke. Now, a miracle is not when something impossible happens. A miracle is when we see the power of God at work. These healing stories teach us that Jesus has divine power for healing. This power caused wonder and amazement in Biblical days and for us today as well. These stories show us that God intends good for human life and that God cares and loves those in need. They show us Jesus' great compassion for all sorts of people.

Jesus Heals

Jesus sees the woman in the synagogue and has compassion for her. She has not asked for help - nor has anyone else asked on her behalf. Jesus calls her over and says, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." And, as Jesus lays his hands on her, she is healed! She stands straight and praises God. Her honor and her dignity have been restored!

Healing and God's intention for wholeness

In some ways this woman Jesus heals is a symbol for me of all of those in need of healing. In each case there is some cause of suffering that takes away from the wholeness and joy God intends for them. Too often, others come to see them not as unique children of God but as 'types' of victims. The person who is poor becomes a 'beggar.' The person who is suffering illness becomes a 'patient.' A person who suffers imprisonment becomes a 'convict.' Each person who suffers becomes **defined** by their limitation. This is not God's intention. We see God's intention for our wholeness in Luke 4 when Jesus preaches in his hometown, saying,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and

recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

When the answer is not what we expect

Remember, I am still on a tightrope now. I'm out in the middle and this is the hard part and your ears are the only safety net I have. ...

Sometimes our prayers are not answered in the manner we expect.

Sometimes the healing Jesus gives is not a physical healing.

Sometimes the healing is of something we don't think or know was broken.

Sometimes the healing is of our spirit or mental state.

Sometimes the healing is of our relationships with other people or with God.

Sometimes we cannot understand why the answer is what the answer is.

Sometimes the answer is a gift of calling someone home to the new heaven and the new earth where healing is permanent and life is eternal.

We ask for what we want – and we are encouraged to do so. However, God in Christ answers us out of God's wisdom, therefore we don't lose faith and we have hope.

God's answer to our prayers for healing come not out of the desire of our hearts but out of the love and wisdom of God's heart.

Illus. My friend, Sharon, has not been healed in her body, but she has been healed in spirit. Bent in body, Sharon is one of the most joyful, faithful, grateful people you will meet. She is absolutely sure of God's love for her and that her love is important to others. Sharon loves God and her church and is there every week praising and thanking God.

Illus. Another person of faith I knew and who was my best friend, came to know that physical healing was not God's intention for him. Instead, he received God's grace to understand his coming death as the complete healing. This complete healing would free him from illness and pain to be with the Lord he loved. That best friend was my father.

Illus. Again and again in life and ministry I see that, as a person draws near to death, their concern is not about themselves. They develop a readiness to go on, but are held back by their concern for those they leave behind. They need assurance that the ones left behind will be cared for and will be all right. This releases them to answer God's call to come home to joy and eternal healing. That actually is Jesus healing – even if we can only grasp that as a leap of faith.

Illus. Sometimes God does choose to give the type of healing for which we ask. Many of you know Reyn Kamphius who is a member of this church. Several weeks ago he was very ill and close to death. Many of us prayed for him as did many other people. God granted physical healing and Reyn has made a complete recovery. He is now so well he has journeyed back up to Indiana for the summer as always.

The role of family and friends

In Luke 5 we are told another healing miracle story. A man's friends bring him to Jesus to be cured of paralysis. It reads:

"5:18 ... some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; 19but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus."

This man on a bed had some kind of friends! The kind I would like to have ... actually the kind I do have and that we all strive to be. Like this man's friends, we are given the power to bring someone in need to Jesus and request help and healing.

Illus. I remember my father doing this when I was a girl. When he heard that someone in the church was ill, he would always go to see and pray with the person and their family. It didn't matter if it was night, he just got out his big flashlight and went into the darkness. It didn't matter if it was in the middle of monsoon rains. He put on a raincoat and picked up an umbrella and stepped into the downpour. I asked him once, "Why do you always go when we hear someone is sick? Why don't you just say a little prayer right here?" He answered, "It is my call, my responsibility within the church, to bring sick people to Jesus in person by laying my hands on their head and praying. You cannot do that from a distance."

The great privilege of bringing others to Jesus for healing

The point is that scripture tells us we are given the great honor of being the hands and voice and heart that bring people to Jesus' healing. We do that when we keep track of one another and listen to one another's need for care. My greatest grief in this ministry is when I discover that some of our members have 'fallen through the cracks' and we have not known their need or sometimes even where they are. My joy is that I am not alone and at COP the ministry of congregational care belongs to all of us.

Gratitude for participation in COP's ministry of caring

I am grateful that so many of you are a part of the caring ministries of this church. We are becoming a church where members play the primary role in being the hands and voice and heart of Jesus. I am grateful for those of you who serve as deacons and shepherding deacons and Stephen Ministers. I am grateful for those of you who take initiative to call in and make sure we know when someone is in need. We need, like Jesus, to keep our eyes open and see and share and double check on each other.

The inclusive context of miracles at COP

I believe in miracles of all sorts – not only physical healing miracles.

Miracles happen when the church phone is answered and someone truly listens.

Miracles happen when our food pantry cares and shares food with people who are hungry; and when our tutors help children master learning; and when Sunday School teachers help children learn of Jesus; and youth are helped to imagine being followers of Christ.

Miracles happen when we grow as equipped disciples and as mission is undertaken and as hearts are moved by music in praise of God.

Miracles happen as shepherding deacons pray for us every day; and Stephen Ministers walk with a person through a crisis; and when we all pray for healing and wholeness.

Miracles happen through the work of the medical professions.

Miracles happen when God calls one of us home to complete healing and eternal life with him in heaven.

Seizing the opportunity

Let us seize the opportunity to become a part of Jesus' ongoing miracles of grace and healing. Let us be a part of the power of God at work as we bring someone to Jesus with a shared touch and prayer offered... in Jesus' name. Because we believe Jesus heals. Thanks be to God. Amen.

CHARGE & BENEDICTION

Go in peace, caring for one another and believing Jesus heals.

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