

SUNDAY • JULY 16 • 9:30AM

JESUS CURES WE HEAL

Rev. Megan Berry

Assoc. Pastor
candidate

A brief
congregational
meeting to follow!



Sunday, July 16, 2023
“Jesus Cures, We Heal”
Rev. Megan Berry | Luke 5:17-26

¹⁷ One day, while Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal. ¹⁸ Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; ¹⁹ but 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. ²⁰ When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” ²¹ Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, “Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ²² When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? ²⁴ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” — Jesus said to the one who was paralyzed—“I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.” ²⁵ Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. ²⁶ Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen strange things today.”

In our text today, we find Jesus around in the Galilee region teaching. We are only in the fifth chapter of Luke, so Jesus is very early in his ministry still. At this point he has only called three disciples, Simon Peter, James, and John, he’s performed a handful of miracles, and has been kicked out Nazareth (his hometown). The Pharisees and other Jewish teachers are hanging around Jesus to see what he will do next and listen to his teachings. They had heard rumors about Jesus and wanted to investigate that his teachings on the kingdom of God are in line with what they are teaching from the Torah. So as we’re taking in the setting in that first verse, seemingly out of nowhere

we're told "and the power of God was with Jesus to heal".

Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear the word healing, I immediately tense up. I don't necessarily think first about Jesus performing miracles and all of the good things that should be associated with this word, rather I think about people, mostly church people, telling me they will pray for my mother's healing, my brother's healing, my healing, etc. and it makes me a little nervous, but mostly wary.

You see, my family and I have had our fair share of health concerns which have included various hospital stays and emergency room visits, but also the daily living with chronic illnesses and disabilities. And while people have good intentions for praying for the healing of someone in the hospital and ER, often, when people pray for my family, they are praying for a miraculous curing of my Type 1 Diabetes, my brother's cerebral palsy, or my parents' chronic health conditions that can be managed but not "cured." So, for me, the word "heal" doesn't bring up good thoughts of a broken arm mending properly or navigating a bad cold, rather it reminds me that less than perfect bodies are often un-comfy to be around because we have these expectations of healing and really existing in the world that don't always match up to our lived reality. I'm sure many of you have your own stories of praying for healing (for yourself or for others) and being more than disappointed when reality didn't match expectations. So, I wonder what it would look like to change our language around a bit. Part of the problem I have with this text is we often interchange "cure" and "heal" as if they are the same word, when in reality, they are two different terms.

When thinking about the difference between healing and curing, I am reminded of a beautiful quote by the late Rachel Held Evans from her book *Searching For Sunday* it goes, "But there is a difference between curing and healing and I believe the church is called to the slow and difficult work of healing. We are called to enter into one another's pain, anoint it as holy, and stick around no matter the outcome." In this quote, Rachel tells us that there is a difference between curing and healing, and I think that is something we often misconstrue in our minds when we read these stories.

Thinking about Rachel's definition of healing, we are reminded that the act of healing is not a one-time fix, it is not something that can be done at a distance, it is not something that can be fully embodied with just "thoughts and prayers." Her vision of healing is the call to be in community with each other, holding on to each other's pain, and sticking together through the hard times.

We see this in our passage with the paralyzed man's friends. Our text tells us that,

“some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus.” These friends have presumably heard about Jesus and the miracles he has performed and therefore want to help their friend by bringing him to Jesus. But our passage doesn’t end there, the story gets more complicated, it continues, “but 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.” The friends did not have a clear path to Jesus, the crowd was too thick, so instead of giving up, instead of saying “oh well we tried,” they instead got more creative and went up to the roof to lower their friend down in front of Jesus. I believe that this is one way of being active in healing. The friends did not give up on their paralyzed friend, instead they kept trying and were with him the whole time. They did not leave him behind the crowd, alone, to run ahead to try to bring Jesus to him. They did the hard work of bringing him along and did everything they could to get him to Jesus.

Now, I want to pause here for a moment. Our text does not tell us if the man with paralysis wanted all of this to happen. We can assume that since his friends are the ones bringing him, that the man with paralysis consented to this, but we do not know for sure. As we talk about healing and talk about the lengths that the friends went through, I want to be very clear that you need to make sure your friend and loved one wants this. We should never assume to know what our friends want and need and should always ask them what they need before jumping into action. Every person’s version of being healed looks different and we need to respect what people are hoping for and the lengths they are willing to go for it. As our lovely picture states, consent is mandatory, and this is true of all aspects of our lives in community. It’s always important to ask someone what they need, how you can be most helpful, and accept that their answer might surprise you 😊

Another version of walking with someone in their healing is doing advocacy work with them. For me, to have someone work with me and advocate for lower insulin prices is more healing than someone telling me they will pray for me and my diabetes. While I love the sentiment and truly believe that people have the best intentions with their prayers and they truly believe that I will be healed (or better yet, cured), the true healing and restorative work for me is being able to have affordable insulin that does not break the bank, to be able to access my life-giving medicine without having to choose between living and paying my rent. That is what healing looks like in my own personal life right now. There are others in the diabetic community who are praying that healing looks like having new research lead to an even better insulin pump that

does more of the work for us and relieves that constant stress of managing what feels like the unmanageable. Even within the same community, we have different hopes and dreams for healing and restoration.

While Rachel distinguishes healing from curing, our Bible has another variation on the word healing. The word for healing can be used for the physical act of healing or curing someone, but often times it is used as a metaphor for delivering someone from their sins or restoring them to society and “making them whole.”

In our text, we find that Jesus sees the friends’ faith and proclaims, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” And then the Pharisees question among themselves, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Then Jesus responds, “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” and then Jesus instructs the formerly paralyzed man to get up, take his cot, and go home.

So, in this little encounter we have two issues going on. The first one being, the man is saved from his sins and now he is no longer paralyzed. Does this mean that having a disability is a sign of a sinful life? Definitely not, but more on that in a minute.

The second issue is the Pharisees lack of faith in Jesus and him claiming to be able to forgive sins. It seems to me that the stories of Jesus healing the man with paralysis and Jesus proving himself to be the Son of God have been mixed together, so our take-aways have led to some toxic beliefs like the idea that having a disability is a sign of a sinful life...

Jesus more than likely knows that most people believe that having a disability is a sign of a sinful life, this was a dominant thought for this time (and unfortunately still today in some religious circles), so instead of simply healing the man like he does for the man with a skin disease just a few verses beforehand, Jesus decides to use this opportunity to not only heal the man with paralysis, but to prove that he is capable of forgiving our sins as well. Seems alright, except what gets lost is the idea that the two are not mutually exclusive like people want to believe. It takes the miracle of seeing the man with paralysis walk after Jesus forgiving his sins for the people to believe the truth.

If we were to have read the preceding verses of our gospel today, we would have read the story of Jesus curing the man with a skin disease. In that passage, we learn that having a disability does not equate to a sinful life, and to be cured of your disability/chronic illness is not qualified on the spiritual and prayer practices you may or may not have. Jesus wants to restore us all into community with each other, and

that is what he is doing in both curing stories.

When Jesus cures the man with a skin disease, we see that the man comes to Jesus and claims, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean” and Jesus responds, “I do choose, be made clean.” And then goes on further to tell him to go to the priests and perform the rituals to make an offering for his cleansing. Jesus is simply cleansing the man of leprosy so he can return to society and no longer be an outcast like he was before. Jesus makes no mention of forgiving his sins, of the man’s spiritual life needing to be changed, no mention of the man’s faith saving him. Jesus simply recognized that this man was not allowed to fully participate in society, and he decided to change that.

In both stories Jesus is doing what it takes to restore these men back into the society that shut them out, so they can live their lives as whole people of God, the way Jesus wants us to live. Jesus did what it took to remind these people that they are whole human beings as they are, and even though in these stories we see miraculous cures and cleansings, I do not believe it is because Jesus saw something wrong with the disability or with the person, rather Jesus wanted them to live fully into society like everyone else. Jesus calls us to the hard work of being with people and helping them heal and be fully integrated into society.

While Jesus was able to cure people, unfortunately, us in this room don’t have those same powers. But, we do have the power of helping heal one another by removing the roadblocks that keep people ostracized from society, from their communities, that keep people from fully recognizing all of their beautiful gifts and skills to give to this world. We have that power to bring people in and help them belong.

So, what would be healing for you? For this church? For Madison? What are the roadblocks you have that keep you from participating fully in society? How can you help someone overcome their roadblocks? Maybe it is advocating for medications to be priced fairly, there are many life-saving medications that are overpriced, not just insulin. Maybe it is petitioning the school board to finally make that one building on campus accessible to everyone. Whatever it is, I encourage you to share your ideas with each other, to talk about what you need, and find your friends that will lower you in front of Jesus as the whole person you are and always have been. Amen.