

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Experiencing Jesus' Healing (Part 2)"
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Sixth Sunday of Epiphany

When we think of Jesus' life on earth, we tend to think of his birth, baptism, temptation, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension. We think of him this way in large part due to the way our church seasons are arranged, around these major events of his life.

We often think of the church's ministry to us at pivotal life transitions, birth, baptism, membership, marriage, leadership in church offices and death. We think of what the church can do for us at the times where we need the church, and there is nothing wrong with this. These are key and pivotal times of our lives. Of course, what happens in between these parts of our lives are also very important, and form who we are, who we are in day to day living of the faith, the trust in God. This is what characterizes who we are.

As we think of Jesus, we must also think of his three years of ministry between his baptism and his death. What was Jesus doing that time? What's the first thing that comes to your mind about what Jesus was doing? Hold that.

Now, look at Mark's introduction to Jesus' ministry. There are lots of possibilities for how you might write an introduction to any great leader's ministry. There are many places to jump in, and many ways to approach the subject. Matthew chose to begin with a genealogy. Luke chose to begin with an investigative style of introducing who Jesus was to a certain Theophilus, probably a specific person Luke knew but also symbolic of every God-lover who would read his Gospel, then he goes on to talk about John the Baptist's birth. John began with the beginning of Creation, in a parallel to Genesis.

Mark begins with the adult John the Baptizer, who is the prophet preparing the way for Jesus, then goes on to Jesus' baptism and temptation and the beginning of his ministry with the calling of the first disciples. Then if you summarize the rest of the first chapter of Mark you will find that it is mostly about healing. Sure, Jesus teaches, he also prays. But mostly it will shock you to realize how much of what Jesus does in his ministry is healing. At least it did to me, as I studied all the Gospels in this regard.

And just as a footnote, I simply take the Gospels at face value. I know there are some scholars who believe that the Gospels are as much as 90% unhistorical and unreliable, and therefore only give us the slightest picture of who Jesus actually was. But there are many NT scholars and historians who believe that the Bible account of Jesus is highly accurate, as accurate or more accurate than any other ancient document on any subject. And regardless of how or what you believe about miracles, it nevertheless gives eyewitness accounts of what happened. This does not mean that every detail of the Gospels can be absolutely harmonized. What it does mean is that the document we have, faithfully represents the person and work of Jesus the Messiah, thought to be of Nazareth, but actually born in Bethlehem. *So what is Mark trying to tell us about Jesus as he highlights his healing ministry?*

I believe it is because he wants us all to take seriously the healing work that Jesus Christ can do and has done in each one of us. (repeat) One of life's great projects is being transformed from the person that we were as an infant and a child to becoming a productive, giving, adult human being. Now who we were as children is largely due to how our parents were. They gave us their genetic material, by the grace of God, and they gave themselves, as they were able, in parenting us.

No one has perfect parents. Some of our parents were more broken than others. Their brokenness and their giftedness rubbed off on us necessarily. This doesn't mean we are exactly like them, it just means a great deal of character is formed in response to mom and dad. Gifts are given us by them. Wounds are given as well. It's not that our parents set out to wound us, this rarely happens consciously, I believe. But nevertheless we are set in a certain direction, with siblings around or not, and their influence. And the system we experienced before we even had verbal skills becomes internalized and gradually we become who we are.

Now as I said last week, if you were beat up by your brothers or sisters, or your father or some other relative, this will shape your life. If you experienced a great deal of mercy, affirmation, encouragement and compassion, this too will shape your life. The question is: what did you receive as a child?

As we look at our lives and review the totality of our lives, we come to note that indeed God is in the midst of transforming us. And although almost all of us here are adults physically, we may have a child inside who is still abused and hurting. We may take an adolescent rebellious position. We may try to parent others who are not our children. All these dynamics happen in relationships. The question is simply to become aware of what you are like, and to bring it to the Lord.

Here is the one and central point to experiencing the healing power of Jesus. Realize what it is in your life where you are needy. Maybe it is an area where you experience unexpected anger coming out of you. Maybe it is a place of sadness or anxiety or compulsion or addiction.

What symptoms do you have in your life that you need to bring to Dr. Jesus? It was clear in today's Gospel passage that the symptoms were a neurological disease called leprosy, which is an inability to feel pain. You might think "Wouldn't it be wonderful to not feel pain anymore?" But this is not a gift, but a terrible disease. People would be cut or burnt or be injured and not know it, so this would continue to the degree that extremities would be gangrenous and then deformities were common.

The leper knew that he wanted to be clean. And Jesus got close to him, touched him and agreed with him for healing. We need to do the same for one another. Does that sound weird? It may, but we do need to agree together in prayer for healing, healing of many kinds.

For example, some of us have been cut off from feeling emotions just as the leper was cut off from feeling physical pain. We too need to go to Jesus as we are unable to feel loss, or unable to identify our emotional states to the point that we can't really connect with people in significant ways. Some of us, all we have is intellectual conversations, but we desperately need to connect with people at the deepest parts of who we are. Not everyone all the time, but rather we need to have support friends and confidants who accept us and give us grace. And these need to be more than just our spouses, who sometimes have a heavy load in bearing our burdens. We need friends.

We need Jesus. We need others. That's why the great commandment is to love God and to love others. It's our greatest need and puts into perspective the rest of life. When these relationships are out of whack, so are we.

And we know that healing ministry is not just a New Testament concept. Already in the Old Testament we see General Naaman, a foreigner, is ready to admit his need. It happened to be the same need as the fellow in Mark 1.

And let me say that being cut off from our feelings is an age old problem. It's not just when a parent says, "stop your crying, be a big boy, be a big girl." It goes

back to ancient times, although it appears that mourning and grieving, for example, was more culturally acceptable than it is today.

So Naaman comes to the prophet and creates a political stir in Judah. The king thinks that the neighboring king is trying to pick a fight with him because he knows that he can't heal this man. But really it is about a young servant girl's advice that was heeded, an amazing thing for that day and age. And so Naaman goes to Elisha and before he can get to hear it himself from Elisha, his servant tells him to go wash in the nearby river.

Now you think he'd be happy, but no, he's as mad as he ever has been. He says "I'm not going into that dirty old river, we got lots better at home." But finally his servants reason with him. And notice that Naaman turns out to be a reasonable man. Sometimes when we are sick and in pain, we are not very reasonable. They reason that if Elisha had told him to do something hard, he would have done it with great courage. But now that he has asked him to do something simple, why not do it anyway? What harm could come?

And here we come back to our stories and the end of the sermon. What harm would come if we brought our pain, our symptoms, our emotional and physical health to the Lord? We need to do so. I am available to make time for you. I believe some of the elders would make themselves available as well, even if this might be something new for them.

Here's the key. Ask for the courage to admit your need. Admit your need for help, and commit the answer to God. You know I'm not Jesus. He healed everyone. I would be pleased to offer whatever your need is to God, and we then would simply see what God would do. There are no guarantees that our pains and dysfunctions and illnesses will all disappear. But we can know that God wants us to bring these things that are weighing us down to Him. He gives us one another to help bear the load, even as we take responsibility for our individual nap sacks of problems and challenges.

In any case, talk to me or one of the elders about these things. Talk to someone you care about this and let's trust the Lord together.

Let us pray.