

First Presbyterian Church of Kissimmee
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“Miracle On Our Street”

Mark 1:29-39 (NRSV)

[29] As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. [30] Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. [31] He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

[32] That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. [33] And the whole city was gathered around the door. [34] And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

[35] In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. [36] And Simon and his companions hunted for him. [37] When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." [38] He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." [39] And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

HEALED TO SERVE

This week Jesus leaves the synagogue and goes to Simon's home. As soon as he gets there someone tells him about Simon's mother in law. She has a fever. And the Scripture tells us that Jesus walked over, took her hand and raised her up.

The word “raised” is the same word used on Easter morn. “He is not here. He has risen.” And it's also the same word used to describe Jesus being “raised” on the cross.

Simon's mother in law is raised up from her illness, and what does she do? She begins to minister to others. She serves them.

As miracles go this one is rather unspectacular. We might call it a mini-miracle. In this miracle there are no shouting demons or untouchable lepers, just a woman with a fever.

But, in Mark's gospel the miracle is never the point. The miracle always points to something greater.

In this case that this is a very down to earth example of what it means to be healed by Jesus. We are healed for a purpose, and the purpose is to serve. We are healed to serve.

MIRACLE ON OUR STREET

Have you been healed in some way? It's amazing how many people can truthfully say that God has healed them. The experience doesn't have to be spectacular. In fact quite often it isn't. That's why I've entitled my sermon, "Miracle on Our Street."

Miracles are not just some spectacular revelation that only happens to someone in the Bible. Mundane miracles happen every day to ordinary everyday people, people like you and me.

Those two words, miraculous and mundane don't seem to go together do they? We think that everything miraculous is by definition something out of the ordinary. But, this simple little story about the healing of Simon's mother in law suggests something different.

Sometimes the healing power of Jesus quiets the screaming demons. And sometimes the healing power of Jesus cures the leper.

But, sometimes the healing power of Jesus comes in that quiet private moment when one human being touches another in love and concern. Sometimes the touch of a human hand can miraculously restore our health and exorcise our demons.

HE TOUCHED ME

On the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel Michelangelo used that powerful image of touch to portray creation. God reached out and touched our world and Adam became a living being.

The Old Testament is a story of God reaching down and touching his people, caring for them as a shepherd cares for his sheep. The Psalmist wrote that God sets the prisoner free, opens the eyes of the blind, and lifts up those who are bowed down.

To put it another way, when we hit bottom, God reaches down to lift us up. He touches us.

In the New Testament the healing touch of God in Christ is seen as a fulfillment of this Old Testament message. In fact the healing human touch is the message.

For example, in the gospel of John we read that the word became flesh and dwelt among us. For the first time God came to us in a human touch, the touch of Jesus.

Jesus touched the untouchables and made them whole. And his disciples continued that ministry after the resurrection, touching others in the name of Christ and making them whole.

That's what made their ministry so powerful. They knew Jesus. Jesus touched them, and they were changed by that touch.

In 1 John 1:1 we read this about the apostle's testimony, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eye, which we have looked at and touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."

PRECIOUS LORD

Thomas Dorsey, not the band leader but the African American Gospel musician of the same name wrote that famous song, Precious Lord. He wrote that song shortly after his beloved wife Nettie died in childbirth and the subsequent death of their newborn son.

Later it became a kind of anthem of the civil rights movement. Mahalia Jackson sang it at Dr. King's funeral. Most of you know how the first line goes.

"Precious Lord, take my hand. Lead me on, let me stand. I am tired. I am weak. I am worn.

Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand precious Lord. Lead me home."

No wonder this song is so powerful. All of us know what it is to be tired, weak and worn. We know what it is to be frightened and overwhelmed by the trials of the moment. But, no matter how bad things get, we can call on Jesus to reach out his hand and lift us up.

TOUCHED FOR A PURPOSE

Do you believe that's true? Do you believe that God still touches the world? Perhaps God has touched you?

This morning I want you to consider that there is a reason God has touched you. Maybe God has chosen to use you and me as His hands today. Maybe God calls us to touch others in his name and raise them up.

When Jesus touches us it's not so that we can stay the same. When Jesus lifts us up he sets us free so that we can serve others.

Over the years I have come to appreciate the importance of presence in ministry. I may not know what to say or do. I may not feel comfortable in the situation that needs healing. But I have come to trust the fact that if I am willing to come and touch others, it can make a big difference.

TOUCHED BY GOD

When I think about those moments in my life when I needed healing, when I was overcome with sorrow and sadness or when I was ill, that quiet personal touch made the difference.

The touch of God came in the Methodist minister across the street. He got me through a rough patch in ministry. The touch of God came from the Baptist minister who talked in halting words about the struggle of his own loss in an effort to comfort me.

The touch of God came through the church member who dropped by with a casserole and an offer to help. The touch of God came through a prayer group from a church in the next town; they sent me a card, and told me that I was in their prayers.

I guess those experiences sound rather common place. But, for me they were miracles. These were times when through simple actions of concern and service I literally felt the touch of God. The miracle came to my street. Jesus touched me and lifted me up.

When and where have you been touched by Jesus? Has someone given you a hand up when you were down? Has someone fed you or soothed your fevered brow?

Think about the time someone has touched you and raised you up, and use that memory as a way to get in touch with God.

HEALED TO SERVE

But, more than that let the memory encourage you to serve others. Jesus said that he came not to be served to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. And he made it plain that his disciples should follow in his footsteps.

They were not called to preserve their life. They were called to take up a cross and follow Jesus.

When Simon's mother in law was healed she immediately got up to serve. That was the point of the healing.

And that is the point of our healing as well. We too are healed to serve others. And it is in this way that the miracle continues.

THE SEARCH FOR HEALING

The world desperately wants to be healed. Even in a down economy health care professionals do a brisk business.

The same was true in Jesus' day. When the word spread about Jesus, Simon's home is turned into a triage center.

As the sun goes down the streets outside the home are filled the sick and desperate people. I guess some things don't change too much. When the sun goes down our streets are often filled with people who are sick and desperate.

Even Jesus, the Great Physician was overwhelmed by this great need. Jesus could heal many, but he couldn't heal them all. You can only touch so many people in a day, and then it's time to take a break.

Jesus called it a "day" long after sundown. But, the next morning he was up before the sun, retreating to a lonely place to pray. His quiet time was interrupted by Simon and his companions.

They said, "Everyone is looking for you."

WHY WASN'T EVERYONE HEALED?

But, Jesus didn't go back to Simon's house. Why not? Why didn't Jesus go back to Simon's house and finish the job of healing the people in that place?

Jesus said that in the final analysis his job was about more than being a great physician. His job was about being a great Savior.

His miracles were a way of proclaiming a more important message about the coming kingdom of God. There were other villages that hadn't heard that message. There were other people who hadn't been touched.

You see, Jesus was God, but he was God in the flesh. He was God with human limitations.

He couldn't touch everyone, but he could demonstrate the power of the kingdom. He could touch some people in towns throughout the whole region.

And he could tell his disciples to pass it on.

Someone asked at Bible study why Jesus didn't just wave his hands and heal everyone in the crowd. He didn't have to touch them.

Certainly God could have done it that way. But, God didn't choose to do it that way. God chose to become flesh and dwell among us. God chose to touch us.

And God has commissioned us to touch others in his name.

WE NEED MORE THAN HEALING

Like the crowds who were seeking Jesus we sometimes have a hard time looking beyond the miracle to hear the greater message. We want Jesus to just stay in our town and become our private miracle worker.

But, if he does that the world misses out on a greater message and a greater healing.

In John's account of the feeding of the 5,000 the crowds decided that Jesus had what they wanted in a Savior, someone who could always give them a free meal.

(That's still true by the way. Look at what happened at the Denny's restaurant chain this past week. Give the people a free Grand Slam breakfast and the lines stretch down the street!)

Anyway, these hungry people tracked Jesus down and were going to make Jesus king—by force if necessary. But, Jesus told them that they needed more than just bread; they needed the bread of life. They needed a hope that came from heaven.

We can have our hungers fed and our diseases healed and still not feel whole.

We need more than a handout. We need a hand up. We need a faith that focuses upon something greater than just the end of our own nose.

We need a faith that not only feeds us when we are hungry and heals us when we are sick. We need a faith that lifts us up to serve.

That happened with Peter's mother in law first, and it has been happening to people ever since. The power of Jesus' touch is still a part of our life.

Every day is filled with miracles of hope and healing—if only we had eyes to see and ears to hear.

BEYOND SURVIVAL

Several years ago I talked with a friend who is working with a struggling church. The church was aging. They were losing members. They were losing money. People were dying and moving away.

They were afraid.

And because they were afraid, they had begun to look too much at their own needs and not enough at what God might be calling them to do. They were focused entirely on survival.

I would say that our healing and our salvation are not complete until we get beyond survival to grateful service.

A minister in West Virginia specialized in reviving small churches. He wrote a book about his ministry entitled, "Beyond Survival." He found that when he was able to get a church to look beyond survival to some form of mission, then and only then would the church begin to prosper.

THE COURAGE TO MOVE ON

Jesus told his disciples that his ministry was over in Capernaum. He had to move on and proclaim the word in new places. Jesus was more than a local miracle worker. His message of salvation was for the world.

I'm sure Simon and the other disciples would have been happy to be hometown heroes. Ministry in Capernaum would have been relatively comfortable. They could have stayed far from the challenge of political and religious authorities in Jerusalem.

But, the Spirit of God in Christ is always on the move, and if we want to follow Him, we have to be on the move as well.

For those of us who want to stay in our familiar, comfortable part of the world, Jesus has a word for us, "There are many places that need the healing, redeeming word I bring. We need to move on. We need to go where we can touch others."

The whole Bible can be seen as a story of how God called people to move on down the road to a new challenge. Service almost always involves a willingness to change in some way.

It's still true today. If we want to follow Jesus we have to stay on the move.

THE COURAGE TO CHANGE

I think that many of us have fallen in love with those things that are comfortable and familiar. We can't imagine being called to serve in some other place or some other way. We dread change of any kind.

I have been reading a book on church conflict this week. The author has been a consultant to hundreds of churches who were in conflict, and he listed a number of things that have triggered conflict in the church.

Almost all of the sources of conflict had to do with change in one form or another.

Change anything in the church and you will cause a fight.

What was it someone once said? The famous last words of the church are: “We’ve never done it that way.”

After all if it’s not broke why fix it? If everyone is coming to us, why would we ever want to go somewhere else? But, Jesus knows that there is work to be done beyond the borders of what is familiar and comfortable.

Some of us have had a miracle on our street. Some of us have been touched and lifted up and healed by Jesus.

But, this doesn’t mean that we stay on our street forever. Just as Jesus called disciples to move on long ago, in some way Jesus is calling us to move on today.

God give us the courage to follow where he leads.

Amen.