

For the healing of the nations, Part 1: being healed
Luke 4:18–19

Today's sermon, Being Healed, is Part 1 of a 3-part series. Part 2 next Sunday is on Being Sick. And the last one, Being Anointed.

We begin with *being healed*. We begin with healing because healing is our beginning. It was an experience of healing that compelled us to place ourselves into the Jesus story. It is the promise and possibility of healing—that we have experienced and witnessed—that has us choose to live our lives as participants in the ongoing Jesus narrative.

Now, when we hear the word *heal* we may not first of all think that it's the story we're living into. We're more likely to think of healing as a bio-medical event. Someone had cancer and was healed. A cut in a hand or finger heals. Broken bones heal. Here, in our Western context, *healing* is most often used to talk about what happens when our bodies are recovering from being diseased or broken. Healing, as we usually think of it, is being restored to good health and health itself is a bodied wellness. And for the most part, healing belongs in the domain of doctors and nurses and hospitals.

But of course this hasn't always been the case. Once the sciences of medicine and biology and pathology developed, they took over the care of the body. And the church was left to care for souls. And we don't usually talk about healing souls. Rather, bodies are healed and souls are saved. So healing is physical and saving is spiritual.

We see this distinction between bodies and souls being made in how the Bible is translated. In the Gospels, the word that is almost always translated as *save* could just as easily and rightly be translated as physical actions: deliver, liberate, rescue. Or heal.

Several things happen when we separate body from soul and spirit; and when we talk only about Jesus saving—as a spiritual act—rather than about Jesus liberating and rescuing and healing bodied human beings. One thing is that we lose the three-dimensional person of

Jesus. Instead of a fully bodied, a real live human being created in the image of His Creator God, we have a one-dimensional Jesus that miraculously heals bodies. He becomes a superhero with a superpower that defies the limits of biology and medicine, a superpower that disappears diseases, makes blind eyes see, and wakes up dead bodies. Superhero Jesus only reinforces our restricted understanding of healing. And of saving, for that matter.

The stories in the Bible give us complex and layered images of healing. From beginning to end, the Bible is revealing what it means to heal. To be healed. Of course we usually think of the Bible being about how to be saved. How our souls are saved. And then if we have the right kind of faith, we also get our diseases and brokenness healed. But if being saved and being healed are the same thing, a new window opens for us to see and understand healing as something more than curing physical ailments. We can begin to imagine healing that isn't just about disease and pathology, a healing that exists beyond the reach of biology and medicine to a healing that is Good News for the sick, the broken, the poor, the captive.

In other words, we don't have to be strong and fit to claim the Good News that Jesus proclaims. The Good News is that healing is now, whatever condition our body is in, whatever circumstances our lives are in. Listen again to Jesus' reading in the synagogue:

Luke 4:18–19 (NRSV)

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because [s]he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor/*lowly/sick*.
She has sent me to proclaim release/*forgiveness* to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
~~to let the oppressed go free~~ *or release/forgiveness to the oppressed/broken*,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Jesus is reading from the Isaiah scroll, proclaiming and claiming these words for the present time. They're no longer a promise for a time in the future, but a promise and possibility for today.

Notice that the word *heal* isn't spoken. But when we remember that healing and liberating are synonyms, then of course this is a declaration of healing. Notice also that Jesus isn't saying "Do x and y and then you'll experience release and freedom." Instead, he's opening Jubilee. He's announcing that here, now, today, the year of the Lord's favor begins.

And Jubilee just got bigger.

And when we watch Jesus encountering people, everywhere he goes, people *do* experience release and healing. We readily think of the woman who had been bleeding for 10 years being healed. Or the blind man who could see. Or the ones who got up and walked or came back to life. As we're looking, notice how often the healing isn't something that Jesus has actually done. It isn't the result of superhero Jesus, but of something inside the person who has just experienced the healing. Jesus calls that something *faith*. Jesus sees that something, witnesses it, names it. Time and again we hear him saying that it was the faith of the person that made the healing and liberating possible.

It should also be said that not everybody that Jesus encountered was healed. Not every blind person received sight. Not everybody who couldn't walk started walking. Because the stories that are told are about healings, we sometimes have the impression that everybody was cured of whatever ailed them. But that isn't so.

But there are other stories that we don't usually think of as healing stories, that are, in fact, healing stories. The Samaritan woman at the well—in her encounter with Jesus, she experienced something that freed her, that unbound her. Something—something within her, within her life—was healed. Something within herself began to heal...and it opened the possibility of reconciliation and restoration with her community. A deeper layer of healing. Zacchaeus—he too experienced a healing, a liberation. As a result of his own release, he released and returned money he had wrongly and oppressively collected. Like the Samaritan

woman, the healing wasn't just a private event, but the healing repaired Zacchaeus' relationships within his community.

And of course, there's Saul who was so tightly bound by his righteousness. Saul was a captive of his own ideology. And he was blind to God's Jubilee that was already at work in the world. And Saul thought it was up to him to bring the day of God's vengeance on all those who had found healing and release in Jesus. But when Saul met the resurrected Jesus, he was blinded and yet, for the first time, he began to see. And his healing began.

And here is a significant piece of the healing that Jesus proclaims. The year of the Lord's favor *does not include God's vengeance*. When Jesus read from the Isaiah scroll, he didn't just pick a random stopping point, he deliberately chose his stopping point. Part of the Good News that Jesus proclaims is that we don't have to be afraid of God's vengeance. Jesus is explicit that disease and brokenness are not God's punishment. Jesus takes God's vengeance off the table. And that is terribly threatening to many. 2,000 years later it's still threatening for many who need a god who will punish and take vengeance. But a God who is love, a God whose vengeance is love and healing, *that* is Good News to the poor and broken.

And a final healing story. I haven't usually thought of this story as a healing story, but surely the story that is at the heart of Christianity is a story about what it means to be healed. It's the story of resurrection.

It isn't that Jesus was poor or broken or captive and was healed. And yet, he was all of those things. And because he was healed, was always being healed, the effects of poverty and brokenness and captivity never diminished his being, never undermined his identity as beloved son of God, never negated his perfect sense of self. Throughout the injustice of his trial and his wrongful death sentence, Jesus claims his healing. Even while he is dying, Jesus

continues to proclaim release to the captives, Father, release them, they don't know what they're doing. Jesus was always about his Father's business of healing.

And in the resurrection of Jesus we see that even in death we can't be broken or bound. As we are being healed, we are living into our aliveness in God, an eternal aliveness. As we are healing—as the diseased and hurting and broken and bound places and spaces of our lives are being healed—we find that we can relax and trust God's aliveness, God's love, God's healing. And we experience our healing, not only a personal healing, but as we are being healed, we find ourselves restored to each other, to all others. As we are being healed, we know ourselves made whole—made whole as an individual, but more relevantly, we are made whole with the one body of humanity, and the one body of creation.

To be clear, my healing is always in relationship to others, and it is always incomplete as long as others are in pain. The more we heal, the more active our participation becomes, joining God's work in the world of liberating and freeing and healing. Not only of human creatures, but of all creatures and creation itself.

The Good News of healing is that I am completely free to engage persons and systems of injustice. My healing, our healing, depends on it. We're free to engage because we don't have anything to be afraid of. We're free because nothing can separate us from the love and healing of God. Nothing can or should ever separate any body from the healing and love of God.

Healing is our beginning. And it is also our end. Healing, or resurrection, is our end. It is our hope. We who have placed our bodies and our living into the Jesus story, when we entered into the waters of baptism, we began a new way of being human, living and dying and rising like Jesus. We began in the end. In our story, the story that we are living into, our end is healing.

Matthew 1:21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will *heal* his people from their sins."

Luke 7:49-50 But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And [Jesus] said to the woman [who had anointed his feet with her tears], "Your faith has *healed* you; go in peace."

John 3:17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be *healed* through him.

John 10:9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be *healed*, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

Romans 5:10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be *healed* by his life.

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being *healed* it is the power of God.