

Sermon Text for May 19, 2019

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

II Kings 5:8-14, Acts 9:32-42

“Does God still heal?”

When Bethany was quite a few years younger than now I was getting ready to say her prayers at night when she said she wanted me to pray for her foot because she had a scratch on it. I did and when she woke up the next morning she burst into our room saying: Daddy, daddy, Jesus answered my prayer and lifting up her other foot showed a perfectly healthy foot. “I just knew that he would” she said with never a doubt in her mind, as she limped away.

The Bible is filled with accounts of healings. Real, true examples of when God’s presence directly intersects with our daily lives. Times when upon request, God acts and touches us, one of us individually and heals by making well that which is not. Do you believe that God still heals in the same fashion that God heals in the Scriptural accounts? Or even more generally, does God still become involved directly in our daily lives?

When Stacy’s mother passed away after a battle with cancer nearly 20 years ago it was a shock to all of us on so many different fronts. The most difficult front to face was the fact that she and her sisters and all of us were praying that she would be healed. We were convinced that God would heal her. As we were flying back to Seattle for the funeral and both of us were obviously upset, Rachel, who wasn’t quite 4, noticed it. She knew that Nonna had died and she said, are you sad? And we said yes. But didn’t we pray that she would be healed? And we said yes. Well, is she in pain now, no Rachel, she isn’t in pain now. Can she eat now, anything she wants? Yes, she can. Can she walk and run and pretty much do anything that she wants now? Yes. And then this nearly 4 year old told two Princeton seminary trained pastors: Well, I guess God did answer our prayers.

The questions that are raised for all of us in the midst of infant death that seems to make no sense, or bombings in churches or shooters in schools, is does God do anything at all in our lives that affects us and impacts directly? Including is God able to intervene in a political situation, as well as heal cancer in a very direct, miraculous way? I say yes!

READ SCRIPTURE

Have you ever heard this story before? It is really a classic Bible story. You need to go home today and read it again. It is a great story of how God acts directly in our

lives even when we are skeptical that God can really do it. When I ask you to go home and read it again do you really do it? Please do it, read it to your spouse, your kids and over lunch talk about it, turn off the TV and for 5, 15, maybe even 30 minutes talk about a story in the Bible.

Let's set the stage for this OT story. Naaman is a foreign king, he has leprosy and comes to visit a Jewish prophet who doesn't even come out to meet him. He sends a message to him to tell him how to be healed. Go wash in the Jordan seven times and you'll be healed. It would be as if someone who lives along the Pequea Creek came here to Strasburg and was told that the only way that they could be healed was to wash in the in the Pequea when we have the glorious Susquehanna which would be a much more appropriate and mighty creek to wash in.

The king was furious. He didn't even come out to greet me. He wants me to wash in the Jordan which is a poor excuse for a river when at home we have two wonderful majestic rivers that are larger and more powerful. Well, he was disgusted because his recipe for healing wasn't done on his terms, in his time, and in his fashion. I'm outta here. But those around him convinced him that he should at least try it. Put his pride on hold. He does and he is healed. He was not happy to be working on God's terms, but he eventually did and he was healed because of it.

Here is a story of God healing someone who really didn't want to be healed in the way that he was healed. Do you believe these stories? What about today? Can this happen today? Can people really be healed today? I, for one, do believe in literal healings. Manuela short version. Some of you do believe that God has intervened in your life, or a family member's life and truly healed them. When was the last time that you asked God to directly intervene and heal someone and actually believe that it is going to happen? Why don't we do that more often not only as individuals but as a church? Do we believe that God actually intervenes in our lives?

It was second nature to the disciples of Jesus. In our second Scripture reading today we see Peter. Remember Peter? I love Peter because he is always aggressively sticking his foot in his mouth and failing with flying colors. But he is also the one that Jesus relies upon to lead his ragtag group during and after his ministry. We find him today visiting local churches and while he is there he notices Aeneas who was a believer but had been paralyzed for 8 years. He looks at him and states: Jesus Christ heals you,

get up and make your bed. And it happens, just like that, and because of that people turn to God and follow Jesus.

He is then called to Joppa to see a disciple whose name was Tabitha. This is the only instance in the Bible where the term disciple is used in the feminine to describe a female disciple. She was a full fledged disciple, leading and serving in the church.

But Tabitha was special in a lot of ways. She was the type who would have been the first to volunteer at the Food Bank. She would have been the one to organize the volunteers and set up and prepare for special events at the church. She ran a system of public welfare for the citizens in the community and everyone loved her so much that they gave her a nickname. Remember Joseph had the nickname Mr. Encouragement. Well, they called Tabitha Gazelle and that was in Greek Dorcas.

You know from time to time you read a name in the Bible and you think, man, I wish I had thought of that one before I named my child. Dorcas Bronkema, now that has a ring to it. Actually Dorcas means something very beautiful, Gazelle which we mentioned earlier. She dies and now follow me as we look at verses 39 following. Peter arrives and goes upstairs and immediately he is surrounded by the mourning widows who made every single funeral that was present. They were weeping and wailing and Peter is just not able to work in that setting so he kicks everyone out of the room. He gets down on his knees and prays and then and only then looks to Tabitha who is lying on the bed dead and states Tabitha get up, and she does.

Does that shock you or do you just assume that it is going to happen because it is a Bible story and it is supposed to happen. People, this happened then and it can happen today because God does still heal, literally. When was the last time that you specifically prayed for this type of miraculous event? We have all prayed for too many to count tragedies that are an epidemic in our schools as our kids are getting shot, but how do you know if your prayer has been answered? Are we praying for God to literally come and make a difference or just that the normal course of events will go as well as possible? When was the last time that we cleared the room, said everyone out, I need to pray here and said: God of creation, in the name of Jesus Christ, do it.

Some of you have prayed specifically for family members and others to be healed. You have seen miracles.

John 14:12ff states, follow me if you have your Bible- "I tell you the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than

these...I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” Jesus gives us a promise that clearly defines those who merely believe in God and those who live their lives believing God. Maybe we don’t believe in miracles because we haven’t seen them. Maybe we don’t see them because we don’t ask. But believing in God who winds us up and lets us go is easy. But believing God will heal your cancer, turn your child from drugs, put food in the stomach of a starving child, well that’s hard. But a mature church believes in miracles because they pray for them and they take place.

I need to tell you about a miracle that took place in the aftermath of Katrina. I receive a phone call late Sunday night two weeks after Katrina hit. It was from a pastor in Mississippi who had lost everything and most of his parishioners had lost everything on the gulf coast. One of his elders had sent his family away the Friday before the storm, the storm came and destroyed their house but everyone was safe, they had fled to Gainesville which was about a half hour from our church in Florida. On the Thursday after the storm the wife and two daughters were driving back to Alabama and were in a terrible accident. The daughters were fine but the wife broke both arms and legs and her neck and she was expected to be a parapalegic. When I went to the hospital to pray for her, I prayed, but not for her to be healed, not for God to directly intervene like Aeneas and heal her paralysis. I didn’t want to give false hope, have him think I was weird, or be disappointed when it didn’t happen.

I missed an opportunity. But I believed that God does still heal directly and can change lives if we would only give him a chance to do just that and not worry about our preconceived notions, like Naaman did, of the way things should be. What was preventing me from boldly going into that hospital room and praying for a miracle while the breathing machine was still on and her arms and legs were in a cast neither of which she could feel? I believe in miracles! I really do. But the reality of the situation took away the reality of God at work. Not an excuse, just something to be aware of. Don’t let that happen to you. Live in God’s reality, we have all had experiences to prove that it works.

I called her husband a few weeks after she had left Florida and gone to Atlanta to a hospital that dealt with those injuries. She had just arrived at that hospital when I was going to be passing through Atlanta with another elder from the church. I had told him, we are going in there and praying for a healing. It was November or so. We went, and

we prayed for healing. The husband said people had stopped praying for healing, with a tear in his eye, but I still do. She was able to talk, but not more or walk. She said, I'm going to walk again. 4 or 5 weeks later at the Christmas Eve service she was able, barely, and with some help from her daughter and husband, walk up with her family and she lit the Christ candle.

Today, I want to give you some homework. I want you for 15 weeks to choose one person to pray for a healing of some sort in their lives. Do you know someone in your family who needs to be healed from a physical infirmity? Do you know someone who needs to be healed from alcohol, drugs, adultery, or any other issue that is destroying them in more ways than one. Pray for that person every single day and expect God to answer.

On September 1 we will have a miracle service of just witnessing to how God has worked in our lives to create real miracles that only God could have created. Believe that in the name of Jesus our lives can be changed, and they will.

On our part, here at the church, we are going to try to be more proactive in following through in the Scripture of James 5 which states that the prayers of the faithful, of the elder of the church, will heal. We are going to be working on that so that we can be more faithful in adding another piece to what it means to be a church seeking the kingdom of God. Amen.