

Sermon Text for October 1, 2023

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Isaiah 53:4-6, Matthew 8:14-17
“The status of the miracle of healing”

In December of 2019 the two year old child of a worship leader of the megachurch Bethel stopped breathing and died. Bethel is responsible for some of the most powerful praise music produced in the 21st century. Goodness of God, King of my heart, all songs that we know and that we sing at our second service and that are favorites and take us to a place to truly worship God. When the child died the church publicized that they were going to pray for the resurrection of this child because they believed that miracles still happen and that those who love God should ask for the impossible from God, because God is able to do the impossible.

For a week the entire Bethel community, thousands of worshippers, got behind the family, prayed for the resurrection of this child and this was the central focus of the church for that week. The child was not raised and was eventually buried a few days after Christmas. The healing never took place, the physical resurrection never happened, and many in the church were left wondering what happened and left with the question of why wasn't she raised and do miracles still happen today, and not just miracles, but healings and resurrections specifically. Today we look at the status of healing in the church, in the community. Is this a church that believes in healing and miracles, and so we ask the question, what is the status of healing today in the church? What do you believe?

If you look at Matthew 10:8, which is not our Scripture for today, we see that Jesus sends out his disciples, and that is what we want to be, disciples, followers of Jesus, we see that he sends them out with a specific purpose and equipped with certain skills. Jesus sends out his disciples in vs. 7 primarily to preach the good news. Tell people about Jesus. We aren't asking that question of whether you are telling people about Jesus or not, that is not our topic for today, but I do hope you are. Then look at vs. 8 : cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the leper, cast out demons. Cure the sick, heal people, that is one of our tasks in this world. Are we asking for God to work in miracles to heal people or do we think it is hokey and it was only in Jesus' day that this happened. What do you think about this?

Spoiler alert, your pastor believes that we have the power to heal. I have seen it, I believe God has used me to heal people and I believe that one of the defining qualities of a disciple is that they are equipped with the ability to heal people from sickness and disease, why? Because

the Bible tells me so. Let's look at our Scripture for today and try to understand it better, because I'm guessing this is something that most of us tread lightly as we approach it.

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Our first reading, the Isaiah Scripture, is one that Jesus uses to explain what he was doing in Matthew as he heals. Look at vs.17, Jesus heals in order to fulfill the Isaiah Scripture, in order to demonstrate that God loves us so much that he actually heals our diseases through the power of the Holy Spirit. Normally, however, we use this Scripture to describe a more ephemeral understanding that our sins have been forgiven as a result of the power of the blood of Jesus. We assign this suffering servant who undergoes a brutal life to Jesus and that he goes what he goes through so that our sins would be forgiven. This is all true and correct theologically. Upon him was the punishment that made us whole, by his bruises we are healed, we have always taken in a spiritual sense that we were made right before God and that in spite of our sin God has forgiven us because of Jesus bruises, we were healed from our sin.

This theological truth is fundamental to our faith, but this is not all that this Scripture addresses, at least not according to Matthew. We can't just spiritualize Isaiah, because we read that Jesus physically healed people and when he did it fulfilled this prophesy. So while we think that Isaiah here speaks of something different than the physical manifestation of healing, Matthew says no, it is also physical healing.

Let's look at Matthew and see what takes place in this healing. Matthew clearly emphasizes physical healing rather than the spiritual ephemeral concept of the forgiveness of sins. We are used to addressing the spiritual, but guess what we are doing today since Matthew is doing it? We are going to address the concept and the reality of physical healing. So, we have made our way down from the Mount of the Beatitudes where Jesus has preached his longest sermon and as soon as he gets off the mountain he encounters a leper who is cast outside of the city and he heals him, then as he gets to the city he sees a centurion who asks him to heal his servant, and he does that.

We know that there isn't two without three, and the third healing is Peter's mother in law. This takes place in Capernaum and when we go to Israel we will see the house where this takes place, the actual house. For some it is a shock to know that Peter was married, we see this also in I Corinthians 9:5. But let's focus on who is healed in these three events. A leper, a gentile centurion, and a woman. All three of them are on the periphery of society, they are all living on the margins. We know that much of Jesus' time is given to the most marginalized. Jesus heals those that many would have thought least deserved to be healed.

None of them had status or power in their church, in fact, they were placed outside of the community in many ways. How much of our time are we giving to those who are disenfranchised, do we pay more attention to those whom we think deserve it and keep at arms length those that are different from us? I say this in regards to healing, because is there anything more personal than Jesus reaching out and healing? Do you see how he heals Peter's mother in law? He touches her, he touches the leper, both were considered untouchable, but Jesus touches. I wonder if at times we don't ask for healing because we don't think certain people deserve to be healed.

Look at this healing and you'll see something that ought to be indicative of most healings. First thing that happens when Jesus enters the house is he sees her, she is lying sick, she had a fever, all things that were passive to her, then Jesus touches her and everything changes. The fever leaves her, she rises, she serves. This movement of the healing puts Jesus first and then she has a role as well. Notice she was healed not just to be healed. She wasn't healed from something, she was healed for something. This is critical. She was healed to serve. She ministered to him in grateful response to what he had done for her. This is a fundamental aspect of discipleship.

Does healing still happen? Yes, absolutely, but not just for the sake of healing, but for the sake of creating servants who can reach out in love to God and neighbor. But Jesus' healing isn't just limited to these three outsiders, we see that at the end of this Scripture people are brought to him, crowds of people to heal, and he heals all of them. This Scripture says that he heals all of them.

How does God choose today who will be healed and who will not? We need to be so careful to not define healing around parameters of faith. That is not what happens in this healing. Peter's mother-in-law doesn't ask for faith, she doesn't express any faith, Jesus just chooses to heal. It is his prerogative, it is God's prerogative to heal and not to heal. That may sound harsh because our God of rainbows and unicorns would choose to heal everyone. But that isn't the case, that is not what happens. Jesus heals because it is God's will that he heals. The same is true for us today. We heal because God's desire is that we would heal. Healing happens according to God's desires, not ours. We don't make the decision, God does.

But this is key, folks, God does want us to heal, God does want us to ask for miracles. When was the last time that you prayed for a miracle? God delivers from sickness as a demonstration of his power over all things, and especially sin. Interestingly, the disease that we carry is ultimately a result of sin. Be careful here, it is not linear, we can't always draw a line

between our actions, our sin, and our physical condition. Sometimes we can. If you abuse substances your body is going to reflect that. But more often than not when we have cancer, it is not a result of our personal sin, but it is a reflection of sin that over the generations has manifested itself in decaying bodies.

The fallen world produced by sin lies behind all suffering and sickness of this age. But I have good news for all of us, we have a promise in Scripture of not only ultimate healing in the end days, but healing today. We know that Revelation promises us in 21:1-4 that the day will come when there is no more tear and crying and that complete healing and restoration will take place. But Jesus equips us with the ability to heal. The healings through the ministry of Jesus and those experienced in our days are the first fruits, the down payment, of the final experience of deliverance.

I truly believe it. Scripture states it, Prayer attests to it, so our next step is to act on it. We will have a service of healing and wholeness on October 29 at 2pm. We will be praying for physical healing for any that are drawn to be healed. As Scripture commands we will have some of the elders of the church present to assist as we pray over you individually for physical healing. This isn't an experiment, it is a confident step in declaring Jesus' victory not only over sin, but over this earth. Amen.