

Join me in taking a moment to think about a time you actually saw or experienced miraculous healing. There are so many types of healing that we encounter and are deeply needed in our world - healing in bodies, in minds and spirits, in the ways we interact with one another in community, in working for justice, in the needed healing of creation, healing in nearly every part of our lives. How did you know that the healing had occurred?

Healing is a miraculous process that is deeply personal and also connected to the power of God. Healing may not always come about in the ways that we expect or anticipate, nor is healing a tidy, linear journey easily followed by a roadmap, a nice little graph that points onwards and upwards. Healing instead gets into the reality and messiness of what it is to be human, both literally and physically. Seriously, I have incredible respect for folks working in healthcare who have to deal with some intense bodily situations that are not for the faint of heart. I also have incredible respect for mental health professionals who bravely go forth in the name of healing for the emotional and spiritual messiness of trauma and pain and mental illness, just to name a few. Healing is a messy business. It is also the messiness of really being human.

In our Gospel story today, we hear of deep and powerful healing for many people, and learn of the many ways in which Jesus meets us and heals us. There are so many types of healing that are needed in the Gospel story today. Simon's mother in law was laid down in bed with a fever that needed healing. So many people were tormented by demons and needed the power of Jesus to cast them out and bring healing to their minds and spirits. So many more people searched for Jesus in deep need of healing. And yet Jesus needed healing too - the healing power of rest and time to recover from hard and challenging work. All these types of healing are important and life-saving and are made possible in Christ Jesus, no matter the time and place.

Jesus' healing is not just a matter of taking away the illness or torment and then everything is back to the normal we envision, like the piece that needed healing never existed. Jesus' healing is an embodied, physical, real

life and feel it around you kind of experience. And the result of the healing is not just the absence of something difficult, life-draining, and painful. The result of Jesus' healing is an invitation to deeply connected human relationship. Jesus' healing is an invitation to deeper human connection.

We are thinking and planning about the season of Lent coming up, which is a reminder of the very fragile nature of human life. It's a humbling season where we are reminded of our mortality, our createdness, the dust of which we and every person are made, and to that blessed dust we will return again. When we are in a season of needing healing, we are also deeply reminded of this fragility and gift of life - that we are not separate from the bodies we occupy, and we may or may not love those bodies at any given season. When we need healing, we must denounce those false gods who tell us our bodies aren't incredible, and instead lean on the truth of the one who created us in love. Sometimes we have nowhere else to turn, except to the one who above all else has the power to create new life, within and around us, in every time and place.

And when we turn to God, to Jesus, the human and divine Christ, we receive a healing that's deeper than any false promises or gods that tempt to separate us from the one who loves unconditionally. The healing that comes from Christ is also an invitation to life itself, a life for love-driven purpose and opportunity to thrive as part of a beloved community. When Jesus goes to Simon's house to heal his sick mother in law, the story does not end when Jesus simply lifts her up. The healing was not simply because Jesus didn't want this woman to be not dead. The story continues with an acknowledgment that the fever left her, the sickness that needed healing was cast away from her, and she then was able to fully participate in the community, to be in relationship and serve the people who were in her home. Her son in law loved her so greatly that he encouraged Jesus himself to enter her home, where she was ill and in a place of great vulnerability, and she met them with courage and hope, that Jesus could heal her. And in that visit of healing, she actively participated in the love of the people around her, serving them and providing hospitality. Hospitality was a huge deal in this culture, way more than we consider now, because

people regularly stayed in people's homes, not hotels or inns most of the time. It was the invitation into the humble, human home life that saved the lives of so many travelers, including Jesus and His disciples as they went on their journeys of ministry.

Jesus' next steps after all these miraculous healings in the hometown of Simon and the disciples seem to surprise His followers. He does not stay in that one place, even though plenty more people sought Him out for healing. Instead, he gathers his disciples and moves on to the neighboring towns, towns all across the region of Galilee, because His healing is needed in more places than just this familiar hometown.

When we think about what Jesus actually did in his life of ministry and healing, very rarely do we see Jesus staying put in one place for a significant period of time. He instead spends His time traveling and actually being present with people, whether it's the single person in need of healing from demons or fever, or a whole crowd of thousands needing the healing power of blessed food. Jesus' ministry and healing is not confined to the walls of the temple or a familiar hometown, He travels across the region so more and more people can hear the good news and indeed experience the miraculous works of the Messiah. Jesus' healing power is not meant for only one person, one type of person, one place or space or time or idea of healing. Jesus is truly for all people, in every time and place, of every background and type, all beloved by our Creator. And that power of healing for all cannot and should not be confined. Not even death itself could confine Jesus and the power to heal that He brings. His death and resurrection continue to heal our spirits and give us new life every single day, no matter how much or little or desperately we need healing. New life is always possible yet not always in the way we expect it, in Jesus Christ.

And yet, as we think of the miraculous power of Jesus' healing, a lingering question remains in Jesus' mission to carry on to other places - what about the people who didn't get healed? All these people were seeking Jesus out in the original town and He didn't heal everyone. What happens when we, in our lives, just don't receive healing?

Healing is not the only way by which we are invited into the deeper human connection, this relationship with Christ Jesus and the larger body of Christ, the community. Think about the disciples who followed Jesus' call. The way they were invited into the ministry of discipleship, of following the way of Jesus, was by Jesus simply meeting them where they were, fishnets, confusion, boats and all.

The courage it takes to simply meet someone where they are is healing in and of itself. Being open and vulnerable to someone joining you in a space of pain or hardship takes bravery, a strong sense of love for yourself and the other. And having the strength to show up for someone who is hurting, without judgment, agenda, or well-meaning but unhelpful advice, is one of the greatest ways we can follow Jesus' call to love our neighbors. Healing is, at its root, an act of love, no matter what form that healing takes. Jesus is God's unending love for us made human, praise the Lord. And that unending love, regardless of the outcome, will heal us in ways that will save us, time and time again.

Dear friends, I pray that in whatever ways you, your beloveds, or this world needs healing, that we will call upon the power of Christ Jesus to bring that healing closer. No type of healing is too big or messy or small or human for God to not meet us in our tenderest places and give us comfort and strength. May the healing power of Jesus, rooted deeply in love, continue to invite you into a deeper sense of what it is to be human, the beautiful messiness and new life that it brings. By the power of God made human in Jesus Christ, this deep connection, healing power, and truly all things are surely possible. Thanks be to God, Amen.