



“What Does Healing Look Like?”

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Scripture (CEB):

Mark 1:21-39

²¹ Jesus and his followers went into Capernaum. Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and started teaching. ²² The people were amazed by his teaching, for he was teaching them with authority, not like the legal experts. ²³ Suddenly, there in the synagogue, a person with an evil spirit screamed, ²⁴ “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God.”

²⁵ “Silence!” Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The unclean spirit shook him and screamed, then it came out.

²⁷ Everyone was shaken and questioned among themselves, “What’s this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands unclean spirits and they obey him!” ²⁸ Right away the news about him spread throughout the entire region of Galilee.

²⁹ After leaving the synagogue, Jesus, James, and John went home with Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. ³¹ He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them.

³² That evening, at sunset, people brought to Jesus those who were sick or demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered near the door. ³⁴ He healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and he threw out many demons. But he didn’t let the demons speak, because they recognized him.

³⁵ Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer. ³⁶ Simon and those with him tracked him down. ³⁷ When they found him, they told him, “Everyone’s looking for you!”

³⁸ He replied, “Let’s head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That’s why I’ve come.” ³⁹ He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.

Sermon:

We have it all: we have chiropractors and ophthalmologists, we have neurologists and psychologists, gerontologists, gynecologists, pediatricians, acupuncturists. We have them all. And when we need them, they are there.

They had none of that. And in the gospel of Mark, more than any other, Jesus is a doctor. He is a nurse, he is a PA. He gives Simon Peter's mother in law Tamiflu and she feels better and gets up to make dinner for her honored guest!

Jesus "heals many who were sick" and "cast out many demons".

He has begun his ministry with a bang! He is on a roll, full of energy and power to heal and to help. Wowza.

He helps and heals in busy Capernaum, and then, goes out into the rest of the countryside around the sea of Galilee to help some more.

Now I don't know how you feel about this text, but over the years I have shifted, from a mindset that says, "Of course Jesus can do this, he is God after all. God can do miracles. That's a nice story of the miracle man. That blind man, that deaf-mute, that cripple, that fevered woman...they were the lucky ones who were near Jesus when they needed him."

I struggle with a God who will heal "many" but not all! Who lets some be healed because they were "lucky" enough to be near Jesus, the magic guy, the miracle worker, here one minute, gone the next. "Oops, you missed your chance"!?

I struggle even more with the constant refrain from some religious circles that you need "greater faith" if you really want to be healed. Pray harder! It feels to me like "victim-shaming" when someone says to a sick and suffering person, "God hasn't healed you because your faith isn't strong enough." It is cruelty to tell a parent their baby died because they didn't pray hard enough.

I don't like a God like that! I don't believe in that sort of a Creator.

So what is going on, in and around Capernaum? What is Jesus up to?

What does healing look like, what does it look like; this freedom from demons?

Is it forgetting the years of blindness, the years of suffering with sickness, the years of possession? I have it from a good authority, someone who has been struggling with treatment-resistant mental illness for ten years, that healing without remembering, without the learning that has come through the years, would not be healing after all. The years of struggle are carved into them, and healing *has to include* honoring the struggle.

I have been powerfully impacted by the testimony of the 156 young women who have told their stories of abuse under Larry Nassar, the gymnastics doctor. Each and every one of them is a survivor, and they have fought hard to heal, to claim a full and joyful life. Some of them say they are still broken. For some of them, healing is hard to find even years after the abuse has ended.

None of them have done their healing without intense suffering. They were ignored and threatened and silenced and shamed and they have had to struggle so very hard, they have exposed themselves to the world in painful and vulnerable ways...to get that terrible man behind bars at last. (Rachael Denhollander, the first to work to expose him and get him stopped, has paid a very high price. See her opinion piece in the New York Times.)

Is their healing a magic wand that someone waves and then, they forget? Magically moves them beyond the dark clutches of his depravity?

Their healing is hard work.

Their healing is courageous work. Their healing took years of struggle and tears and fear. Years of courage and determination. They call themselves an “army” now.

When Jesus healed, did he honor the courage, the struggle, the inner effort of the human soul to claim healing, to claim its life? I believe he did.

Did he realize that we will carry the marks of our sickness in our bodies, in our spirits even though the sickness may end? I believe he did.

Did Jesus understand that in fact, we are who we are, *through* our struggle to be whole. To be healed? I believe he did understand.

And what was the healing?

Was it sudden perfection of body, or soul?

Or was it peace with what is?

What does healing look like?

I’m not sure. I have a lot of question marks in this sermon...

I am just certain that it is not all the same thing, it is not just one thing.

It is not simple, and I do not think it is amnesia.

Healing is carved into us, even as our sickness carves itself into us.

We are who we are because of what we experience. Sickness and health. I know I am who I am because I grew up with epilepsy as a part of me. It is an intrinsic part of me, even though I no longer have seizures.

No, I don't believe that Jesus neutralizes our experience and our memories when he heals.

I want to think that he honors our lives and our struggle, and touches us, with dignity and love. And that can be healing.

I would like to think that he touches us when fevers sap us of life and joy, and we return to ourselves and find our joy, and cook up a party meal for everybody!
But I am not sure about it.

I think healing, and casting out the demons that destroy us, is hard work, takes time, takes tenacity and determination.

And so, though I don't know if Jesus did instantaneous healings, I do think he recognized that not all healing is the same.

So, perhaps, "many were healed" because that is what healing is; a journey, a struggle, a path to go down. And we don't always see when healing will come.

Perhaps. I am not certain.

I guess the only thing I am certain of...is that Jesus wanted to give people the experience of joy, of feeling well, body and soul, of a life to live.

I am sure of that.

Because it wasn't enough to aid Simon Peter's mother-in-law, or the people of Capernaum; no, Jesus says: "Let's head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there, too. That's why I've come."

To bring God's intention of healing and wholeness into the world, that all of us, and all of it, might become "the kingdom of God"...with beauty and wholeness in every part!

Amen, alleluia!