

SERMON TITLE: "Jesus 101: Jesus & Healing"
SERMON TEXT: Mark 1:40 – 2:12
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: August 12, 2018, at First United Methodist Church

INTRODUCTION

As you entered the church this morning, you might have noticed a big blue banner asking you to vote "Yes" on Proposition #3. I have that banner displayed because I've been working hard this year—first with a petition signature book and recently at a parade route, the county fair, and a letter to the editor—to talk with people about Proposition #3, which will be on our ballots this fall. If enough people vote "Yes" on Proposition #3, it will expand Medicaid to cover 150,000 low-income Utahns who, right now, fall into a coverage gap that severely limits their ability to access healthcare.

I've been volunteering my time and effort to this cause because I believe Jesus cared deeply about people's health, and that he wants his disciples to do the same. And I'm telling you about this *today* because, last Sunday, I began a sermon series on the basics of Jesus as found in the Gospel According to Mark. Like a beginning college course, I'm calling the series "Jesus 101." Last week's sermon was on "Jesus & the Gospel." In that introduction, we learned that the word "gospel" refers to both the good news spoken by Jesus and the good news that the gospel writers perceived and told about Jesus decades later.

Today we move on from the verbal announcements of Jesus' good news to some of his early demonstrations of life in God's kingdom. As soon as Jesus began preaching and teaching, he found himself interacting with people who were suffering from physical handicaps and limitations. Like a school child who has trouble learning to read because his stomach is growling, we human beings have physical realities that demand our attention. Jesus quickly came to see that his ministry could never be just abstract words lofting through the air. Jesus perceived that human spirits are very tightly connected

to human bodies, and that our well-being and salvation are a function of both. So, this morning, I invite you to consider what the Gospel of Mark tells us about “Jesus & Healing.”

1—HEALING WAS A MAJOR PART OF JESUS’ MINISTRY

In this gospel, we see almost immediately that healing was a major part of Jesus’ ministry. Healing the sick occupied a great deal of his time and attention. The early chapters of Mark are full of Jesus’ healing stories. Just in chapter one, after Jesus called some disciples, he healed a man who had an unclean spirit, and then he healed Simon Peter’s mother-in-law who had a fever. Later, the community brought to Jesus “all who were sick or possessed with demons,” and Jesus healed them. According to verse 34, Jesus then healed “many who were sick with various diseases.” The next verses indicate that Jesus sneaked away for a little bit of prayer time and some additional proclamation of his message. But then, in verses 40-45, Jesus was back at it, healing a leper.

This busy healing ministry continues. In Mark chapter two, Jesus healed a paralyzed man who was let down through the roof. In chapter three, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand, and even broke the Sabbath law to do it. Chapter four doesn’t have any healing stories, but chapter five has nothing but healing stories—telling how Jesus healed a man possessed by an evil spirit, a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, and the young daughter of the synagogue leader. Mark 6 speaks about Jesus’ time at Gennesaret, and how people brought all their sick to him to be healed. Mark 7 tells the stories about Jesus healing the daughter of a Syrophenician woman and then curing a man who was both deaf and mute. In chapter eight, Jesus healed a blind man, and in chapter nine, Jesus healed a boy who was continuously harmed by a violent spirit.

All that is far too much to speak about in detail, but you can see the big picture. If you want to learn the basics about Jesus, here’s a very important and prominent fact. Such healing stories were told about Jesus in Mark and the other gospels because healing was a major part of Jesus’ ministry and identity. There is no such thing as Jesus without healing. Jesus and healing go hand in hand.

2—JESUS DIDN'T HEAL ALONE

While healing is one of the major characteristics of Jesus, we should note that Jesus didn't do this healing all alone. Before the first healing story in Mark, we learn that Jesus had called some disciples who went with him. Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law because Jesus had been invited there as a guest of that family. And Mark 1:32-33 tells us that, while Jesus was still at their house, "the whole city was gathered around the door." They had "brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons."

In Mark 1:40, the leper came to Jesus, asking to be healed. Mark 1:45 tells us that "people came to Jesus from every quarter." And, in Mark 2, the friends of the paralytic carried him to the house where Jesus was. When they had no access because so many people were seeking Jesus' help, they carried their friend up on the roof, made a hole in the roof, and lowered their friend inside the house so Jesus would see him and heal him. When Jesus saw the determined faith of these friends who carried out this act of love, Jesus was eager to offer the healing that was needed.

3—JESUS & HEALING FORGIVENESS

This truth about Jesus and healing is still in effect today: Jesus doesn't heal alone. Jesus heals those who seek him out and those brought to him through the faith of others. Healing is part biology, physiology, and chemistry. And healing is, in large part, spiritual community. Healing comes through compassion, caring, and forgiving.

The story of the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2 makes clear that forgiveness and physical healing have some kind of interactive connection. Today, when we say that an illness is psychosomatic, we're often dismissive—like the illness is an imaginary thing, all in the person's head. But, truly, our bodies and our spirits are intertwined and connected. Mental and spiritual health definitely impact the well-being of the body and vice versa. A positive spiritual life doesn't guarantee that we won't get

physically sick or mentally ill, but having a strong connection with Jesus and God certainly helps us cope when disease and illness come.

Many of us would prefer to keep our sicknesses privately to ourselves, or just between us and God. Maybe we allow our doctor to get involved. Maybe our spouse. Maybe our children and siblings. If we're really brave, maybe we let our church family in on the secret. Probably different situations call for different amounts of common knowledge. But, for sure, when we're sick, Jesus doesn't heal alone. He needs us to be engaged, and it sure doesn't hurt to have some others in the loop, forgiving the burden that we are, and carrying us to God in prayer.

Can you imagine the interaction between the paralytic and Jesus? Mark tells us what Jesus thought and said, but I'm guessing that the paralytic might have been the first one to speak. I imagine him saying to Jesus and whoever owned the house, "I'm so sorry to come busting in here like this. I'm so sorry my friends tore up your roof. I'm so sorry that I'm demanding your attention when there are obviously so many others who need your care. I'm so sorry that I'm this wretched mess that needs other people to take care of me. I'm so sorry for whatever I've done that got me into this terrible situation. I'm so, so sorry."

So, of course, the first words from Jesus weren't a command to "stand up and walk." The first response from Jesus was, much more naturally, "Your sins are forgiven." Those divinely powerful and spiritual words conveyed the deeply healing message, "You don't need to feel like you're a burden. You don't need to worry about the roof. Whatever got you into this bind is water under the bridge. We can all see how much you are loved. Your friends have gone to these great lengths because they care about you. It's going to be OK. Let go of your guilt. Be at peace in your spirit. You're going to be alright." Only after Jesus pointed out the divine healing power of the community's forgiveness was it possible for the paralytic to regain ability to stand and walk.

CONCLUSION

I believe very strongly that Jesus cared about people's spirits and bodies, and that healing was a major part of his ministry. Of course, we all wonder why some people, even very faithful Christian people, pray and pray and don't get the healing results they desire. None of us knows the answer to that profound and legitimate question. But we can tell from these healing stories that Jesus cared deeply and worked very hard on this issue of providing healing for as many people as he possibly could.

And I believe that Jesus is still working very hard, with our collective participation and help, to heal people today. As followers of Christ, we are called to get involved, like Jesus, to forgive those who are suffering and offer to carry them, if need be. As we're about to do, we can anoint with oil, and we can pray. We can help drive people to doctor appointments and visit them at the hospital. We can send get well cards and take casseroles. And we can vote, as a community, to expand healthcare access. All these are great ways to participate with Jesus and healing.