

SERMON TITLE: "Jesus 101: Jesus & Healing"

SERMON TEXT: Mark 1:40 – 2:12

PREACHER: Rev. Kim James

OCCASION: July 28, 2024, at First United Methodist Church

INTRODUCTION

Our church's prayer list is a bit shorter today than it has been for some time. That's great! It means some of you who have been sick or recuperating from surgeries have been making progress toward healing. We shout "Hallelujah!" and praise God for the improvements that have come, just as we continue praying for those who are still in need of Jesus' healing touch.

A couple Sundays ago, I began a sermon series I'm calling "Jesus 101." Using the Gospel of Mark as our text, we're working through the basics of who Jesus was and what that means for our Christian faith. We began our "Jesus 101" series with "Jesus & the Gospel," explaining that the gospel of Jesus was good news to those who heard it. Then, last Sunday, we talked about "Jesus & Vocation," as we read about Jesus calling the fishermen, a tax collector, and others to follow him and participate in his important work.

Today we move on from verbal proclamations and invitations to some of Jesus' 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. No matter how nice the good news sounded, 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 priority 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 Mark 1:34, Jesus then "cured 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 man who had leprosy.

This healing ministry continues. In Mark chapter two, Jesus healed a paralyzed man who was let down through the roof, and, in chapter three, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand. 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. Some of you may remember that we spent a whole worship service on this

same topic, just a few weeks ago. Why the repetition? Because 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, Jesus had called disciples to work with him in this important ministry. Mark 1 tells us that 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 their door." They had "brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons." It sounds like quite a crowd!

Likewise, after Jesus healed the man with leprosy, Mark 1:45 tells us that "people came to Jesus from every quarter." Then, in Mark 2, the friends of the paralyzed man carried him to the house where Jesus was. There were so many people there that the friends couldn't get access to Jesus. That's why they carried their friend upstairs, 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.

Jesus didn't heal alone then, and he still doesn't heal alone today. 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.

3—JESUS AND HEALING FORGIVENESS

In Jesus' ministry, the importance of a helpful and merciful community is emphasized over and over again. In Mark 2, the story of the healing of the paralyzed man 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—as if the illness were an imaginary thing, all in the person's head. But truly, our bodies and our spirits are intertwined and connected.

Psychological, social, 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 the faith community 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 closest friends. If we're really brave, maybe we let our church family in on the secret. It's true that different situations call for different amounts of shared knowledge, and we generally don't want to cause a burden of care for other people. But, most often, Jesus doesn't heal alone. Jesus uses doctors, nurses, family, and friends. Jesus uses x-ray technicians and medical transport companies, and Jesus uses neighbors and church members. Jesus needs us to be involved, giving care when we can. And it benefits us to have some others in the loop, too, forgiving whatever burden we might create, and carrying us to God in prayer.

Can you imagine the interaction between the paralyzed man 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."

Consequently, the first words from Jesus weren't a command to "stand up and walk." Much more appropriately, the first response from Jesus was, "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’re 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 paralyzed man to regain his ability to stand up and walk.

CONCLUSION

One of our hymns proclaims:

When Jesus the healer passed through Galilee . . .
the deaf came to hear and blind came to see . . .
A paralyzed man was let down through a roof . . .
His sins were forgiven, his walking the proof . . .

After several more verses of Jesus’ healings, then the song has this final, seventh verse:

There’s still so much sickness and suffering today . . .
We gather together for healing and pray:
Heal us, Lord Jesus!*

I believe very strongly that Jesus cared about people’s spirits and bodies, and that healing was a major part of his ministry. And I believe that Jesus is still working very hard to heal people today. As followers of Christ, we’re called to share burdens and offer forgiveness so healing can continue to happen. With our collective participation and help—our own lives, our families, our congregation, and the community around us will be blessed by Jesus and healing.

*“When Jesus the Healer Passed Through Galilee,” by Peter D. Smith, 1979, c. 1979 Stainer & Bell, Ltd.