



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 auburnpres@gmail.com

“Healing and HEALING” Luke 5:17-26

Each month when we gather to continue God’s healing, before the healing ministry we worship, we hear God’s Word, and we taste God’s love in Communion. Each Bible message focuses on a healing text, usually featuring Jesus. That’s true tonight, also.

But sometimes, the texts surprise us as they teach us about God’s healing. That’s true tonight, also.

I invite you to open your Bibles to Luke’s gospel, chapter 5. We’re going to read verses 17-26, as Jesus heals a paralytic and defends his healing ministry. Listen with me for God’s Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud. *[text]*

We find this story in all three Synoptic Gospels, the ones that seem to pay more attention to chronology. I happened to pick the Luke text tonight, but there are things we can learn from the Mark and Matthew versions, too. This text is almost a “two-fer”—two incidents that require a quick change of context. First is the healing, and then there’s the jousting match between Jesus on the one hand, and the Pharisees and teachers of the law on the other hand.

Let’s start with that healing. Well, actually, we can’t start there; a very important piece precedes that. Jesus was teaching—remember, people often called him, ‘rabbi’, which means, teacher, in Hebrew. Matthew says it was at Capernaum, where Jesus had his northern headquarters; Mark says Jesus was ‘at home’, suggesting he had a house there, for a time. Already, Jesus is attracting a lot of attention—not all of it positive. In fact, a lot of these Pharisees and teachers of the law have heard about him and made the trip in order to hear him teach. Impressive! Luke notes that “the power of the Lord was with him to heal.” That’s the Holy Spirit—on hand, in him, eager to be about the Father’s business.

In the middle of this “conference plenary session”, with the crowd jammed into the house, some men came—“they came” is all that Matthew and Mark record—and they are desperate to get their friend to Jesus. But the crowd has so filled the room, plugged up the door and windows, and spilled out into the street that there’s no way they can get through that group with their friend—a man on a stretcher, because he cannot walk.

I like these guys. They’ve pitched in to carry their friend up to Jesus. But they would seem to have hit a roadblock. And yet, perhaps they’ve come a distance, and having lugged this guy that far, they’re not going to accept defeat at the first obstacle. The two, three or four of them come up with a plan. They carry their friend up the side of the house using the stairway that was an extension of the side wall. This can’t have been easy—the stairs were narrow, and they’re carrying their friend on the stretcher, who must have been bouncing around pretty hard. At last they’re on the roof, up where the women dried their clothes, or food. They set their friend down. Now, what? One of them starts pulling off the roof tiles, and scratching through the loose

sticks below that. Soon there's a small hole. The man looks down to see where Jesus is. Then he starts enlarging the hole to the left, so that he will be in line with Jesus.

Imagine now that you're inside, one of the many people sitting cheek-by-jowl on the floor, listening to Jesus. You vaguely hear someone on the roof, but you don't think about anything about it. But then there's more noise than you're used to, and there's a stream of dust and debris that begins to cascade down, as if it's raining dust, and the roof had a leak. Actually, now the roof DOES have a leak—and soon a face in the leak,—and then more digging and a bigger hole and more dust. I'm sure Jesus has just stopped, and maybe stepped out of the way of the falling dust. Now all eyes are up on the ceiling, and the hole is several feet wide, and using the cloth belts from their robes, these guys lower a stretcher through the opening, with the man on it, terrified he's going to fall or fall off the tilting cloth mat. And finally, with a bump, he lands in front of Jesus.

Now, what does Jesus do? Did he scowl at the interruption? Well, I think he laughed out loud! I think he was so surprised and impressed with these friends' ingenuity that he just laughs and snorts!

Now, what does Jesus do? He speaks. He says, "My good man, go in peace. You are healed! Your faith has made you well." No! Jesus says, "Friend" (or, "man" in the Greek original), "your sins are forgiven you."

Don't you think that is strange? I mean, would "sins" be the subject you'd expect Jesus to talk about, when a man who obviously can't walk—doesn't the stretcher suggest there's a medical problem?—is dropped right in front of him?

When they hear Jesus speak this assurance of God's forgiveness, the church leaders in the crowd are offended. This is blasphemy—it's lying about God. God is One—that's the innovation of the Jewish religion, it's in the "Sh'ma" prayer which is the foundational prayer of praise uttered at every worship service. "If God is one, then who does this guy think he is??! If he thinks HE's God, he's lying about God." And no good Jew will stand for someone lying about the Holy One of Israel. The Law was clear on what to do with those who lie about God—they are to be put to death by stoning. So a groundswell of mumbled outrage begins to go through the crowd.

Jesus hears it, and he's ticked, himself. Hey, he says. Check this out! Is it easier to say to some crippled guy, "Your sins are forgiven," or, "Stand up and walk"?

Well, the answer to that is clear. Anyone can say "your sins are forgiven," because there's no way to know for sure, is there? It's not as though we expect God to lower a neon sign that says, "Forgiven", or to see a big hand descend through the clouds and enter a house and give a "thumbs up". We don't even expect a voice to enter the minds and hearts of the crowd, saying "Amen!" Anyone can say "your sins are forgiven". But to say, "Go ahead! Get up and walk!"—well, that would be put to the test right then and there, wouldn't it? And who is going to risk announcing a healing that turns out to be a mistake—or a fake?

But Jesus is not done. He continues: "But so that you may KNOW that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—now he turns to the paralyzed man—"I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home." And immediately, that's just what he does, singing and dancing in praise to God.

I think it got awfully quiet in the house.

Jesus is done for now. I imagine him dismissing the crowd except for his disciples, and when he's with his own, they discuss what has just happened.

Well, what DID just happen? The man was healed, and the man was HEALED! And Jesus identified himself publicly as the Son of Man, whom the Jews would have understood as a divine title, from a verse in the book of Daniel. The Son of Man was to come to inaugurate the new age of God's rule—another way of talking about God's Messiah. The new age has begun with Jesus, this country carpenter from a third-rate town in northern Israel. [We'll have to stop here, though there is much more to be said about Jesus' authority.]

What about these TWO healings? The healing and the HEALING?

Why do we think that physical healing is something different—a 'whole different animal'—than forgiveness and salvation? In Greek, the word for healing is "salus"—the same word for salvation. This paralyzed man was healed of his paralysis. But even before that, he was made whole before God by forgiveness. He was saved and he was set free from the chains of paralysis. By the physical healing, Jesus demonstrated his authority to declare God's forgiveness of sins. Indeed, he is the Son of Man, and the Son of God.

And here's one thing more—just a guess on my part. Which healing came first? Forgiveness—the healing of this man's relationship with God. Could Jesus also be saying that THIS healing is even more important than the physical healing? I think that's exactly what he's saying. After all, this physical healing seems primarily to serve as the proof of Jesus' authority to declare God's forgiveness; it's almost incidental that this man gets to go home with mobility and vitality.

What is the take-away from this message from God? I can think of several things. First, the health of our relationship with God is primary. If we are committed to a sinful lifestyle, running our life on our own, then there's not much that God is likely to do with and for us. Yes, there are exceptions, but they are exceptions. So each of us must examine ourselves as we come to God—as we come to worship, or for healing and help. See, we NEED to have the confession prayer early in every service, and we NEED to receive God's healing of our relationship with Him (which WE cannot do). That's what forgiveness means. The barrier is broken. God's arms are open wide!

A second take-away is the tie between all kinds of health—spiritual, emotional, physical. There can be damage and pain in all three areas—spiritual pain, emotional pain, and physical pain. God wants to heal it all—some here in this life, some when we see Him face-to-face.

And a third take-away is to notice where the "faith" is. We don't know if the paralyzed man could speak; even if he could, we don't know if he had asked his friends to take him to Jesus. But we can say that these friends had faith enough to bring him--and persevere through a big problem--to get this man to Jesus. What is the shape, how much commitment, endurance and perseverance is there in your faith, your trust in God's goodness? Aren't most of us like the father of the demon possessed boy we met last month who asked Jesus, "If you can, heal my boy." "If you CAN?!" Jesus says. "Everything is possible for the one who believes." And the father says, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief."

Lord, strengthen our faith to have more faith. We even have to depend on you to believe!

So in light of our depending on God for everything, even to have sufficient faith to trust Him, we now show our dependence upon God yet again by coming to the Lord's Table. We come because Jesus has invited us. The initiative is his. We come because God has provided what we cannot provide.

Now, you might say, "Well, I saw Dottie bring in the bread and grape juice. So, what do you mean, 'we cannot provide this'?" This meal we call a "sacrament"—a holy act—is not in the bread. It's not in the grape juice. It's in the connection with God. If God isn't here, this is just a small, silly snack. But if you can sense Jesus here right now, then this is far more than flour and water and salt and crushed grapes. This is a sign—a living marker--of salvation. This bread-and-juice puts us at the table in that upper room with Jesus and his disciples, if Jesus is here, for it's the same Jesus. This bread is God's sign of healing of our relationship with Him—in the acted-out language of Middle Eastern hospitality that overcomes alienation—if Jesus is here.

We can't make that happen. We can't make Jesus 'show up'. We depend on God--to believe, to be healed, to be saved. Thanks be to God, who provides salvation and healing and feeding out of his great love to us!

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California for the healing service of June 15, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]