



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 apc@auburnpresbyterian.org

“Healed Unbelief” Mark 9:14-29, Matthew 28:16-20 Healing Ministry

Before we begin today, I want to offer an apology for last week’s chaotic worship. It was my fault. I forgot to ask our guest pastor, Brad Van Sant, to oversee Communion. When Preston asked Brad about it, Brad was clueless, and Preston took on that responsibility. As soon as the choir finished, Preston ran over to the office and got on the computer to our national Presbyterian Web site, trying to find out “how Presbyterians do Communion”. He was about to print out what he needed, when Silva frantically came over to tell him Brad had finished the sermon early— imagine, a short sermon from a preacher! So Preston abandoned his research, ran back here with Silva, then tried to pull it off as smoothly as he could. But on top of that, in response to the desire to make Communion flow more quickly, the new “three station system” was confusing for everyone, and I hear the Communion was like watching a bunch of ants move randomly around the room. All because I had not mentioned “Communion” to Brad. So, I’m sorry. Already we have worked out another serving system to make it go more smoothly, and I will be sure to give good, clear instructions. My apologies.

Now, today, before the healing ministry we will offer, we first open God’s Word to learn something more about God’s healing. We will meet an epileptic boy and his desperate father—a story of failure to heal, and of at least two kinds of healing.

When I was a kid, one of the favorite kinds of puzzles I worked on when the family was traveling in the car was a “find the figures in the drawing” puzzle--you know, “How many squirrels can you find in this picture?” As you hear this account from Scripture, see how many healings you find happening here.

Please find Mark’s gospel, chapter 9, starting at verse 14. Before we begin reading 9:14 through 29, I want to take a moment to point out the context of this incident. What happened before this encounter? Jesus, James, Peter and John had been up on a mountain, where Jesus had been “metamorphosed”, to use the literal Greek word—transfigured, radically changed in appearance. It was Jesus, but clearly more than the Jesus they knew. Still dazzled by that awesome display of God’s glory given to Jesus, and God’s voice ordering them to “listen to my Son”, these three disciples who formed Jesus’ inner circle came down the mountain with him.

In verses 9-13 the disciples have a bit of a theological debate with Jesus, for these three men have had a vision of the triumphant Christ, a preview of his Second Coming in glory and power. They were thinking the end of the age which God had long promised had come at last, and that Jesus was the warrior-messiah to lead the nation to throw out the Roman occupation forces. But they are not fully sure. Wasn’t Elijah the prophet supposed to come first, to point to God’s Messiah? Jesus answered them, saying, in effect, “That happened already, in John the Baptizer. And look what happened to him, Jesus says: God’s prophet, beheaded in prison. How

could it be any different for the Son of Man?” Jesus speaks about a defeat—for the Elijah who came again in John, and for God’s Messiah, too. I don’t think his disciples could process that yet, especially after the glorious vision they had just experienced up on the mountain.

Now here’s the focus story for today. Listen for God’s Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud from Mark 9:14-29, in the New International Version. *[text]*

Did you spot the multiple healings?

First, of course, there is the failure. Jesus and the “big 3” have walked down the mountain, and walked right into a failure. A man has brought his epileptic son to Jesus’ other disciples, and they couldn’t cure him. Certainly that reflects badly on the disciples—and then, too, on Jesus himself.

Doesn’t Jesus seem exasperated, as if this case was not all that difficult? That’s how I read it. When Jesus turns to the boy, the spirit of epilepsy in the boy attacks, as if to get in one more lick as he is forced out by the superior power of Jesus. It’s quite a violent display, and Jesus draws back, a bit surprised.

Jesus has that side conversation with the father. “How long has he been like this?” Jesus asks sympathetically. “This must have been tough on you and your family.” “Like, forever—since he was a kid,” the father says. “It’s been awful; it’s all we can do to keep the boy from hurting himself. If you can, please cure him.”

“If you can?!” Jesus smiles, with utmost confidence and poise. “All things are possible to him who believes.”

Immediately the father sinks to his knees and says, “I believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Perhaps the father has wailed out his words, for the crowd has begun to move toward them from another part of the scene nearby. Jesus takes charge. He commands the bedeviling spirit to leave and never return. With one last convulsion, the spirit departs, and the boy—probably a young adult by now—is left so exhausted that he looks dead to everyone who has just gathered. But no; Jesus raises him up—perhaps a preview of his own resurrection by the power of God, or of his raising of Lazarus.

Now, it’s the disciples who are agitated. They can’t wait to get a word with Jesus. They follow him indoors, eager to know why they failed to cast out the demon. Jesus says, “This kind comes out only with prayer.”

Hmmm—had they not prayed? Had they thought some ritual imitation of Jesus would bring the power of God to bear on this evil, life-sucking spirit? Did one of them offer a customary prayer to God, and then THEY took over?

Do you see where I’m going with this? Who did the disciples think was in charge of the healing ministry—they, themselves? No, God was (and is) in charge. Prayer allows God’s power to operate through us. We are only helpers in God’s healing.

Your friends in our Healing Ministry know that life following Jesus will have failures in it; we won’t be living up to our potential at times. God doesn’t always heal on our schedule. Not everyone we talk to about Jesus will immediately fall on their knees and ask to become a

follower. We shouldn't take it personally if someone with whom we minister does not immediately improve. It's not "our fault" if someone for whom we are praying does not receive the blessing we seek.

All these discouragements are based on a false premise—a belief that WE are the evangelists instead of the Holy Spirit, as if WE are the healers instead of The Great Physician (Master Jesus), as if WE had magic in our prayers that coerced God into granting blessings.

Do you hear the "divorce" between God and us that is assumed in these thoughts? Each mistaken notion is based on what WE do. God gave us orders to heal and we obey, and we do it each Second Sunday, but "it's not about us". We are the "glove" you see moving, but it is God's hand in us that creates health where there was sickness.

Let's not make the mistake of believing God just sent us a letter from a distant country with orders to evangelize, heal and ask for blessings, but once the letter was out, God ceased being involved. (Some people see the Bible as such a 'letter'.) That's a form of idol worship—putting the Bible in place of God.

Doing what God wants is not a message from afar; it's a message up-close, as we listen to God here and now for how God wants to evangelize and heal and grant blessings, as we come alongside what GOD is doing ALREADY. Do you get this difference? This is VERY important!

In this account today, there is failure that reveals lack of connection with God, but there is also faith. And it doesn't have to be a lot of faith that Jesus can and will provide the healing. Give Jesus a little opening, a smidgeon, a mustard-seed-sized faith, and he will drive a Mack truck through that, with a joyful laugh in the devil's face!

Sometimes well-meaning Christians will try to perform a healing, and if nothing happens (nothing that they can see right away), they will suggest that the suffering client has defective faith. "You don't believe enough."

Ba-loney. A "single mustard seed" sized faith is plenty—not to make God come through, but to give God an opening to come through and receive glory and gratitude. In the end, it's not about our faith; once again, it's about God's grace. When we don't see a healing, we should say, "I don't know why you were not healed. Let's keep looking." Our Healing Team members give out our "after-care cards" to those with whom we minister, to encourage this "keep looking", "keep praying", "keep coming back". Persistence in prayer is a big theme with Jesus, and if so-called "stubborn cases" require stubborn prayers that don't give up, how much more glory God gets when He does later perform a healing, often in a way no one expects!

There is failure here, there is also faith—oh, yes—and multiple healings. The boy gets healed, right? But doesn't the father, also, get healed?

When we use the term "healing", we tend to limit our vision to painful or limiting physical or emotional conditions. But if someone comes to trust Jesus for salvation, isn't that healing, too? The word for salvation and the word for healing are virtually the same in Greek. Yes, there are multiple healings here—at least two we can identify, and perhaps others among people in the crowd that has gathered. And perhaps there's also been some "faith healing" in certain disciples who have been given another chance to get it straight about how much power

they have, vs. how much power God has, and Who it is Who does what healing. It's a healing in itself, I think, to see things rightly.

Lack of faith in Jesus is a sickness that needs to be healed. Don't you know people who don't follow Jesus? Those folks may think they're perfectly healthy, but they have an illness that holds them back from experiencing all of life. It's as though they have settled for the old 'black and white' TV, when 'color' TV—now in "high definition"—allows us to experience telecasts we a whole new "live" quality. Don't you feel pity for people who settle for black and white? And there's more—"the Jesus TV" talks to us, right from the screen. It's not "a program" we watch; it's our life on the screen, and we are not spectators--we are in every scene.

Does this help you feel like you want to help "the black and white people" get past their life-limiting handicaps?

It's all about God, connecting with God, and God's grace. Prayer is the way we come to God for His power to heal as He directs. Even demons are subject to Jesus' followers, in his powerful name, as we see in Luke 10:17. So with that confidence that depends utterly upon God, your Healing Team members minister healing in Jesus' Name—not just saying "Jesus", as if that "Name" were magic. No, to take the "Name of Jesus" is to have such a living, right-now connection with God that we know God's will and we move as God is moving—not faster, not slower—to make His will be done on earth as it is in heaven .

Be careful to avoid the mistake so many churchgoers make—as if "talking about Jesus" is the same as doing The Jesus Life with Him. The point of being a Christian is not "talk about Jesus" as much as to "imitate Jesus in his connection with God."

Jesus said, "This kind comes out—this healing happens--only by prayer." I'd like to invite you to stay and pray after the last song of the morning and the blessing. Just make your way to the center section and have a seat again while others may leave. Please bring the passion of your love for God (or your desire to have that passion), and bring the power of even beginner's prayers, to partner with us in the healing ministry today. You may come, alternately, for physical healing, emotional healing, or "faith healing"—getting a new trust in God, and a desire that pants for God like a thirsty white-tailed deer pants for water. . . . Those who must leave after the blessing, please file out quietly so that we may begin this healing work.

To God be the glory! Always!

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on April 13, 2008, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]