Healing and Community

John 5:2-9 Kimby Young

John 9:1-11 January 28, 2024

Healing is a mystery. Even with our modern medical science, we don’t fully understand the human body, brain and systems. Different bodies respond in different ways to the same treatment. Beyond the purely physical, there are influences of mind and spirit that affect our health. A person’s social support system and relationships help in the healing process. That’s why in the Bible sometimes when there is a healing, they talk about sin or a person’s connection to God and others. Many cultures recognize the influence of other factors beyond the physical. But sometimes we get it wrong – as with the second scripture, when they discuss whose sin caused the man’s blindness. And Jesus says – neither. We don’t fully understand the connections of body, mind and spirit. We have begun to speak of wholistic care and treatment. We look at the whole person and everything that is important to them as we seek healing. For many of us, we have seen the power of prayer to influence unexplainable changes, to bring a miracle of healing. In many ways, healing is still a mystery.

In today’s scripture we heard two separate accounts of miraculous healing offered by Jesus. One man couldn’t walk. Another man was born blind. In both miracles, Jesus not only healed the man’s body, Jesus also restored each man’s place in the community. In fact, Jesus put more emphasis on healing the soul and setting things right in each man’s life. It was not just about walking or seeing. In both cases, the miracle Jesus offered was a whole new life – connected to God and connected to others.

In the first story, the man who had been begging at the sheep gate for 38 years, Jesus started the conversation by asking “Do you want to be made well?” At first that seems an odd question. Of course, he would want to be well. He had been waiting by the pool for decades. Because he was not able to walk, he could not work, he could not enter the temple, he could not live with a family unless they also were willing to be labeled unclean. By his own admission he didn’t have anyone to help him try to reach the pool to be healed. He was alone, broken and outcast. Of course, he must want to be healed.

But notice, the man doesn’t actually answer Jesus’ question. He doesn’t say, yes, I want to be well. Instead, he starts explaining why he’s been there so long, why he can’t be healed. He says whenever he tries - someone else steps down ahead of me. Someone else gets in his way. Someone else blocks him. Someone else receives the healing. Someone else. What he doesn’t say is, maybe he has given up trying. Maybe he has made some other kind of life for himself. He has found a way to eat and live and get what he needs by begging. Maybe he doesn’t want to change. Maybe he doesn’t want to take the risk. After all, if he were healed, if he could walk, then he’d have to get a job and another place to live. He would have to meet new people and do different things. Maybe Jesus question in the first place was the exact right question. “Do you want to be made well?” Do you want to be whole? Perhaps that is the exact question we are being asked through this scripture. And if we do want to be whole, what must change? Are we ready to work at it? Are we ready to make the changes?

Perhaps Jesus saw something in the man – some bit of hope, some willingness to change, some need. Because Jesus immediately heals him. “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” Immediately, 38 years of waiting ended, and the man began his new life.

The first thing that happened to him was to get in trouble with the temple leaders because he was carrying his mat on the sabbath. Suddenly a whole new set of rules applied. He was no longer the lame man by the pool. This healed man had to figure out how to live in society and how to get along in this new order. He didn’t get off to a good start.

What is interesting in this story and sometimes overlooked is the end of the story. Jesus circled back around and found him again in the temple. Jesus the healer had a follow up visit with his patient. The temple leaders hadn’t offered to help the man or teach him. They just criticized him. It seems no one was there to help him figure out his new life. But Jesus knew that physical healing was not the end of the story. Jesus knew this man had to find a whole life, a balanced life. Perhaps Jesus had seen or heard about the encounter with the temple leaders. Jesus knew that a person doesn’t fare well if they get targeted by the political temple leaders. For the first time in his life this man was not an outsider. Jesus wanted to help him to live inside society. So Jesus finds the healed man in the temple and says, “See, you have been made well!” I don’t think Jesus was talking about the lameness. Jesus was giving advice about how to be accepted by the temple leaders. How to fit into society and have good relationships with others. Jesus not only wanted to heal the man’s body, Jesus wanted to heal his relationships. The last line of the story says, “The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.” I think that’s what Jesus told him to do. Jesus sent the man back to the temple leaders so that they would focus on Jesus, and would not be mad at the healed man. Jesus wanted the man to be connected to others and to God. Jesus wanted the man to be whole.

The second scripture for today goes into more detail about the man who was blind from birth. Not only does Jesus heal the man’s blindness, All of the blind man’s relationships are changed, because of the healing from Jesus. The man takes on a whole new role in the community and grows in confidence with each interaction. We didn’t read the whole story this morning because it is 40 verses. The gospel shows how the man begins to build a new life – first with his neighbors, then with the temple leaders, then with his parents, then with the faith community. Toward the end of the chapter – this man who had been a nobody, not even welcome in the temple – by the end of the story this man has become a powerful witness for Jesus. He is confident in his life and in his faith. He argues in the temple and gives glory to God. The man who was blind, now sees clearly while others do not see or understand. He has found his place as one who is healed and made whole by Jesus. He gives glory to God. His simple statement, “I was blind, but now I see” has inspired multiple generations, and has become a foundational understanding of God’s amazing grace.

The miracle of healing is not just about making a body well. The healing Jesus offers is healing for the whole person – making everything right. It starts with the relationship with God in Jesus Christ and grows from there. If that connection with Jesus is healthy, wholeness follows.

Today we are having our annual congregational meeting. In many ways this is just a business meeting, just a formality of reporting about life in our church. But in other ways, this annual meeting is a miracle of healing and wholeness. It is a reminder that we are one body in Christ, that we all belong together. Only in our connection and support as a community are we able to be healthy and whole. Only together are we all Jesus wants us to be. We need one another. We need for each one of us to be healthy and whole, to contribute our gifts and to share our lives. We must support one another and build up the church together. Jesus knew that community is essential to health and wholeness. God’s grace holds us together. God’s grace calls us to care for one another. Jesus shows us who God is and how God loves. When we see that, when we receive that gift of God’s love, our lives are made both whole and holy, by the grace of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God.

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John 5:2-15

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethzatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed people. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The ill man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’ ” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk’?” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

John 9:1-10

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.”

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.