

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 3 July 2022

2 Kings 5:1-19, Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Living God, help us hear your holy Word with open hearts so that we may truly understand; and, understanding, that we may believe; and, believing, that we may follow in all faithfulness and obedience, seeking your honour and glory in all that we do. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Faith and Healing

Have you ever healed a person before or been healed by someone? The word ‘healing’ is an inclusive language by which we express our wellbeing and wholeness. Healing had been an important part of Jesus’ ministry. As such, when Jesus sent out seventy, their mission was also to cure the sick and proclaim the coming of God’s kingdom. Faith and healing go together. As such, we’ll see it how faith initiates healing, and how healing brings people to faith in God. Lastly, the healing ministry needs to be our daily practice today.

Faith initiates Healing

In 2Kings 5:1-19, titled ‘the healing of Naaman,’ faith initiates healing. People in this reading are somehow involved in faith. Among them, an essential character is the Israelite slave girl. Taken captive, she has come to serve the wife of Naaman. Breaking out of the silence of slavery, she speaks about a prophet who can cure the master. Her words of hope draw a series of responses from Naaman, the king of Aram, the king of Israel and finally, Elisha. In doing so, she directs Naaman to God’s healing power through Israel’s prophet. By the end of the story, we don’t see her any longer but Naaman’s restored body and faith in the God of Israel. Had the slave girl doubted what she believed, she wouldn’t tell her mistress about the cure in the first place. She was anonymous to us, but her faith is known to God through the healing of Naaman.

In Luke 10:1-12, 17-20, we see another example. When Jesus sends out seventy disciples for the mission, Luke especially uses the word ‘*heteros* (ἑτέρου).¹ to differentiate them from the twelve disciples. They are not only anonymous but also poorly equipped for the mission. What qualifies them as missionaries is faith. Jesus knows that the environment will not be friendly. Yet they have to rely on the hospitality of the people in a town. Their specific tasks are to cure

¹ For disciple - *mathetes*

the sick and proclaim the coming of God's kingdom. Later the seventy return with joy and report their successful mission to Jesus. But Jesus says that they should rejoice not because of the successful mission but because their names are written in heaven. They remain anonymous to us but not to God. Faith also leads those who are healed to faith in God.

Healing brings faith to people.

Healing as a path to faith is similar to removing the thick layers of clothes to reveal the bare body. Naaman, the overall commander of the military, knows that his words are heeded and obeyed. Yet his leprosy vexes him even with his status and resources as he can't find a cure. The healing takes place when he has to let go of the thick layers of ego that have covered him. It begins to heed a captive slave girl's words. Next he has to go to unfriendly lands; he also follow the instruction of a ridiculous treatment prescribed by a foreigner; he even heeds the wisdom of his own slave as well. Every time, a bit of pride or power that Naaman has been relying on most of the time falls away while leaving him vulnerable. He even has to dip himself in the River Jordan, which he despises where lowly common foreigners bathe, clean clothes and drink, and much inferior to the rivers in his homeland. As he is healed, the healing leads him to the God of Israel.

Healing is not confined to physical illness, but broken relationships and all aspects of life. As the body of Christ, we are supposed to do healing ministry. Yet we often think that healing ministry is a special area for someone who is especially gifted. In the church, we do so many different things that bring healing to the sick. Whenever we can help people feel accepted, connected and valued, whenever we inspire and support life-giving choices and behaviour, whenever we offer lifelines to those who are most at risk – these and many more are Christian expressions of the call to bring healing and help people live flourishing lives. So how do we begin? The best place to start is where we already are. Stop, look around. Who is having a life-giving or restorative experience through something you are already doing? If you are not sure, ask around. Ask your neighbour - 'What life-giving experiences have you had of this church in the past year? And listen to what comes back.

Healing ministry in and outside the church

We are often hesitant to take up the call to heal the sick because we don't feel we can cure the sick. Even if we lay hands on the sick and pray, we may doubt whether it will work or not. But the slave girl and the seventy didn't doubt when healing took place. All they did was to put

their faith in God. Nowadays a ministry of healing in our church is very minimal, or it's not even visible. So today we'd like to practice of healing by laying hands on one another with a simple healing observance. If you wish to share in the laying-on hands, please place a hand on the shoulder or arm of the person in front of or next to you.

[Healing liturgy]²

Jesus says, 'come to me all you who are troubled, and I will give you rest. So come you who are burdened by regrets and anxieties, you who are broken in body or in spirit, you who are torn by relationships and by doubt, you who feel deeply within yourselves the divisions and injustices of our world. Come, for Jesus invites us to bring him our brokenness.

Scripture Reading

Jesus Heals Many at Simon's House

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him (Mark 1:29-34). Our song is – It is well with my soul.

Hymn – "It is well with my soul."

When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll.

Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say; It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well (it is well), With my soul (with my soul), It is well, it is well with my soul.

Prayer before the laying - on of hands

God our Creator, we are held in your everlasting arms.

Jesus, our Saviour, we are healed by your wounded hands.

Holy Spirit, be present as we reach out to one another in love.

² Some parts are from Iona Abbey Worship Book, p90-91, 94-95

(We lay hands on one another's shoulder/arm)

Prayer for the laying - on of hands (repeat after me)

ALL: SPIRIT OF LIVING GOD, PRESENT WITH US NOW.

ENTER YOU, BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT,

AND HEAL YOU OF ALL THAT HARMS YOU,

IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.

Closing prayer and blessing

Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ, rest your weary ones, Bless your dying ones, soothe your suffering ones, pity your afflicted ones, shield your joyous ones, And all for your love's sake.

And now, may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing that we may abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.