

“What I Came to Do”

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Isaiah 40:21-31 Mark 1:29-39

Have you ever prayed for healing for yourself or someone else? What difference did it make?

Last Sunday Ammal read how Jesus went into the synagogue in Capernaum and astounded everyone because he not only taught with authority, he demonstrated that authority by casting out a demon. Then Maurice read this morning that Jesus went to Simon and Andrew’s home, where Simon’s mother-in-law was sick with a fever. Immediately he “took her by the hand and lifted her up. The fever left her, and she began to serve them.”

It’s a good thing she started feeling better, because soon the whole city was at the door, bringing their sick and those possessed by demons. Word must have gotten out that Jesus was a healer, and they all flocked to the house, hoping that Jesus could help.

Now notice it says that “they brought to him *all* who were sick...” and “he cured *many*.” It doesn’t say he cured *all*. Just *many*. And this is always the problem with spiritual healing. Why do some people get healed, and others don’t?

In the story, it might just be a question of time. Jesus was only one person while he walked on this earth, and he could only do so much in one place in a certain amount of time. But God is not limited by space and time. If God really loves and cares for us today, if God is capable of being everywhere at all times, why isn’t everyone healed? Is it because our faith isn’t strong enough?

There are many things about prayer and healing we don’t understand. But I do know it makes a difference what we pray for. Sometimes our prayers are not answered because we pray for things we really should be doing for ourselves. Does it make sense to pray for healing when we’re doing things that make us sick? What we eat, whether we drink too much or smoke, whether we exercise, how much stress we live or work with, and how much sleep we get, has a big effect on health. Do our knees hurt because we are overweight? Are our lungs diseased from smoking? To pray for healing in these circumstances is asking to be exempt from the consequences of risky behavior. Better to ask God for strength and wisdom to take better care of ourselves, rather than to intervene to fix what has gone wrong, so we can keep on neglecting or abusing our bodies.

Sometimes people don’t find healing because what they are asking for is inappropriate. If you are 102 years old, and your body is shutting down, does it make sense to ask God for physical healing? People’s bodies are not meant to last forever. And sometimes we bring extra suffering on ourselves by trying to stay alive. There

comes a point in life when we have to let our bodies stop, let go of life, and allow others to carry on in our place. Can you imagine what it would be like if no one ever died? There'd be no place left to even stand up, not to mention having babies. We should never see death as a failure of God to save us. Death is a part of life that we eventually have to accept.

Still, while we are alive, we pray for as much health as possible, so we can live fully and enjoy the benefits of life. And we try to cooperate with God's spirit by taking care of ourselves.

Some people think that God is only at work if healing goes against the laws of nature. But since it is God who created us to start with, God also works through natural healing processes. And God can work through doctors and medicine as well. Some people feel they shouldn't have to depend on medication, whether it's for diabetes, blood pressure, depression, or anxiety. They see it as a sign of weak faith or a moral failing. But healing can come in many different ways, and we thank God for doctors, nurses and medicine.

Of course prayer help too. Many people feel prayer calms them down, helps them focus better and brings all kinds of healing. But not all faithful people get what they pray for, even when they pray for something reasonable or good. It's not their fault. It's just the way it is. Still, there is one thing we always get when we pray, and that's communion with God. Prayer lifts us out of ourselves and connects us to the creator of the universe. And that's what is important in the end... not how many years we manage to live on this earth, but whether we live in God's presence and love.

In today's story, after a night of being besieged by the crowds, Jesus got up before sunrise and sneaked out to a deserted place to pray. His disciples found him and told him everyone was searching for him. We can guess what everyone wanted. There were more people to be healed, more demons to cast out, more problems to solve and needs to be met. Jesus knew these were real needs, and healing was part of his teaching. But Jesus decided to move on. He could have stayed in Capernaum until every last person was healed. But that's not what he came to do. He cared about the people and their needs. He had compassion. He did what he could. But he also had a message to proclaim throughout Galilee, and that was the main thing, to be faithful to God's call.

Someone once told me that she didn't think she was a good Christian because she had to miss so many church meetings to take care of her children. Did Jesus ever attend a committee meeting? He did meet with his disciples at times, but that's not what he came here for. He came to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

Now in the Presbyterian system, almost everything is decided and carried out by committees. That's how we make sure that everyone who wants to has a say, and that we work together. And together we accomplish a lot, much more than any one person could do alone. If you stay for the annual meeting after worship today, you'll hear what all

these meetings have produced in the last year. I'm happy when people serve on committees. But the committee itself is not the point. The point is to glorify God and communicate God's presence and love to the world.

If you are a parent, there's nothing more important in the world than to take care of your children. That's a major way they learn of God's love and care for them, and it is your call from God. Yes, you do other important things too. But you need to remember what's most important.

And this is a good message for us as a small church, because sometimes we think we have to do everything to be faithful. For a small church, we do a lot. We feed hungry people at the Loaves and Fishes soup kitchen. We sponsor a home for victims of domestic violence, volunteer in the Family Promise homeless shelter, help build houses for Habitat for Humanity, and work with day-laborers to help them know their rights. We offer English classes to help people live in a foreign country, and participate in the larger community. We teach Sunday School and Bible classes and sponsor other activities for church members and friends.

These are our programs and activities. And they are part of the message, just as Jesus' healing was part of the message, an expression of God's presence in the world. If you want to learn the details of our committees, you can read about it in the annual report. But for the meeting, I've asked the elders to say in a few words how they've seen God at work through their committee in the last year. Because that's what we're here for, to glorify God, and be part of God's work in the world.

May we pray for each other, for healing where it is needed, and for strength and courage to glorify God and proclaim the message of God's presence and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.