

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's story picks up where last Sunday's left off. And Jesus is up to the same old thing again—that is, healing. Last week, it was a man with an unclean spirit. This week, we hear about a woman with a fever and many people who were sick or possessed being healed. Yet, Mark isn't the only gospel to speak of Jesus's healings. In fact, every single gospel talks about these acts. Jesus heals women and men, young and old, rich and poor, Jewish and Samaritan. The gospels show the breath and the depth of Jesus's healing. So too, these healings show us something about humanity.

You see, our world is oh, so flawed. No matter how many antibiotics and clinical treatments are administered, we are sick. Sure, we try our hardest to cover it up. We put on a smile at the same time depression, anxiety, and trauma eat us from within. We work to pick ourselves up only to find that racism, or sexism, or ableism, or you name the -ism knocks us back down again. We struggle to balance the pressures of homelife and work-life while feeling like neither is going well. So too, self-care and care for neighbor are sometimes too exhausting to even imagine. And, we also find ourselves trapped in systems that own us even if we wish to opt-out— those systems of white supremacy, systems that put profit over people, and systems that perpetuate the rape of land, sea, and sky. No matter how we slice and dice it, we, as a people, are in need of healing.

Jesus knows this about humankind. That is why right here, in the first chapter of Mark, Jesus got to healing. But it's not only that humanity needs healing, but rather, there is something deeper in Mark's gospel. After all, the first verse of Mark's gospel tells us its thesis, namely that this book is "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God" (Mark 1:1). Then, a dozen or so verses later, Jesus was "proclaiming the good news of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news.'" And then, a dozen or so verses after that is today's reading where Jesus is healing people and he says that's what he came to do. You see, these things are related and building on one another. Mark is telling us about the good news of Jesus Christ, son of God, and then Jesus says that the vision of God is coming near, and then (boom) God's vision is seen in healing.

Is that making sense? Ok, good. And, here's another important thing to notice: The healing wasn't some disembodied, spiritualized, after-life seeking, reign of God happening at some later time kind of healing. No. This healing thing Jesus is up to is an incarnational thing. This healing is about bodies and lives. It's a healing from fevers, from the things that consume us and drive us, from the things that seem to control us and take our bodies hostage, this healing thing is real—it's flesh and bone.

And, this is so, very important because it reminds us that Jesus's ministry based on God's vision for the world is here and now. It's about liberation of the oppressed in the present, it's about God's favor for the poor in the here and now, it's about dismantling systems of oppression in our lifetime, and it's about restoring that which is broken today.

And, a few moments ago we were reminded that in baptism we are called to follow in Jesus's footsteps. We look towards Christ's life, death, and healing ministry as our best model for being together. For, as we experience God's vision coming near, we are called to be agents of healing.

And, I want to pause here for a moment, because sometimes we forget that being agents of healing follows the great commandment, which is to love God and your neighbor as yourself. That means, you're encouraged to love God *and* neighbor *and* self. It's not an either/or; rather, it's a both/and. And sometimes we don't take seriously the need to care for ourselves so that we can care for others. Especially as we cope with the trauma of the pandemic, protests, and partisan politics, finding balance within that is so important to bring healing.

And, friends, I'm concerned about us as a people, and about you individually. Healing is hard. The healing process can be painful. Healing takes time. And, Jesus knew that. In today's reading, Jesus took time for himself, he took time to pray and center himself, he took time for healing so that he could heal others. And in this week ahead, I hope you can set an intention to meditate on how *your* healing is going. It's not a selfish action, but rather it's an action that follows Christ's model, and it's an action that can be the springboard towards healing for all. So, take care of your body, your mind, and your spirit. Get a good therapist (and by the way, if you don't have one, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois can hook you up, and they offer sliding scales for payment and tele-visits). Then, get your heart pumping with some exercise, and fill your lungs with God's gift of breath. And, so too, close your eyes and let your

senses rest. Then, take some time to give thanks for God's gifts, and maybe make a goal to read through Mark's gospel over the next month or two. As you take these moments, know that this is God's vision coming near to *you* in bringing healing and wholeness.

And, once you're on the journey towards God's divine healing and wholeness, then you can begin to share the good news of Christ by as a healing presence to others. You see, after you begin to experience healing and wholeness, then you can bring healing to others. After you begin to heal, then you can begin to do the work of healing our broken systems. After you begin to heal, that is when you can partner with our God.

Friends, I know this is a tall order. It's a lot. And, it doesn't make it easier that it's cold as all get out in Chicago. But, I'm proud of you for taking time today to begin the process of healing. You see, gathering here each week is taking time to being the healing process. Gathering around God's word to glimpse the healing that is emblematic of God's vision. Coming together around the font in baptism to be reminded of God's healing vision. Gathering bread and wine at Christ's table is the healing gift that reminds us that we are love, we are all welcomed, and that by God's grace we are strengthened to heal and to bring healing. In this place, we came to know that we are not alone on this journey of healing—we're here together. And as we walk on this journey, we'll find a little corner to begin healing injustice. We'll discover new ways to bring healing to ourselves. And, we'll discover that the best healing balm is found in the assurance of God's love and grace. Amen.