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John 9:1-11

Healing

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 9:1-11 The Message

Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?” Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light.” He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man’s eyes, and said, “Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “Sent”). The man went and washed—and saw. Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, “Why, isn’t this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?” Others said, “It’s him all right!” But others objected, “It’s not the same man at all. It just looks like him.”

He said, “It’s me, the very one.” They said, “How did your eyes get opened?” “A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ I did what he said. When I washed, I saw.”

The man blind from birth doesn’t ask to be healed. This man is a catalyst for a conversation between Jesus and his disciples about the relationship between sin and illness. There was a common belief at the time that the parent’s sin was visited on the children. We too wrongly see illness as a symptom of a lack of forgiveness, or sin, or unfaithfulness, or careless words.[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus lets the disciples know that the man’s blindness is not about sin and who caused it, but it is an occasion for someone to be given new life.

Jesus’ disciples don’t identify with this man; they don’t even speak his name. After the man blind from birth is healed, he is the man who begged. Then he is the man who had formerly been blind and later in the story he is the blind man. It is really hard for the people around him to adjust to his new reality. Some folks don’t even recognize him at all. He has to tell people that he is the man they once knew to be blind. His parents say that they know this healed man is their son and that he was born blind, but they don’t know how it is that now he sees and they don’t know who opened his eyes. In this story the healing takes place in 2 verses but there are 38 verses of people’s reactions. Everyone looks at this man and sees an outcast. Jesus looks at this man and sees a beloved child of God.

Today we are having a healing service. When I served as a pastor in the Methodist Church in England, the church had healing services and it was not something that I had ever experienced in my church when I was growing up. I thought healing was only something that I would see on the television as televangelists would hit someone on the head and the person would fall back because they had been healed. The Bible strongly affirms healing, in fact the root of the word healing in New Testament Greek, sozo, is the same as that of salvation and wholeness. Spiritual healing is God’s work of offering us wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.

 All healing is of God. A healing service does not detract from the gifts God gives us in medicine and psychotherapy. Worship today is no substitute for either medicine or the proper care of our health. My hope is that our worship today will add to our total resources for wholeness. And, know that everything that we are doing came directly from the United Methodist Book of Worship.

A healing service is not a service of curing, but provides an atmosphere in which healing can happen. When we pray for healing, we often mean that we want to get better. But the ultimate form of healing is to be reconciled with God in heaven. Healing means that we are reunited or reconciled with God and when that happens, physical healing may occur, mental and emotional balance may be restored, spiritual health is enhanced, and relationships are healed. As followers of Jesus the Christ, as Christians, spiritual healing is about renewing and strengthening our relationship with the living Christ.

There is a show and tell nature of our lives. We know our lives are headed in the right direction when there is proof, when the blind see and the lame walk and bills are paid. However, everything is not possible. The Kingdom of God is not here yet. The nature of our world and our humanity means that suffering will happen. We will get cancer, we will have disease, we will have depression, we will get hurt by the church, and we will get hurt by other people, sometimes by our fellow church members. God does not promise that we shall be spared suffering but does promise to be with us in our suffering. In the worst of times for us, we will not be alone.

We are people with good news that God is here and we are loved. It is enough. You are perfect, just as you are. You are the gospel. The good news is that God is here and you are loved. Joy persists and we are invited to soak it in because life is both so beautiful and so hard.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The story of the man who was born blind makes me think of my past. What do I need to let go of to embrace the future with hope and joy? What new name do I want to claim for myself that will help me live into who I am called to be. Child of God? Beloved? My sister’s dog recently died. She was a miniature greyhound or whippet and was almost 18 years old. My eleven-year-old nephew has had a hard time because for his entire life, their dog Lily has been a part of his life. From when he woke up to when he went to bed, his dog was always there. So, he went to school the day after his dog died and he couldn’t figure out how or when to tell people. Does he try at lunch time? Everyone is happy at lunch, so it doesn’t seem like a good time. But, this is a big part of his life and he wants to share it with his friends. He doesn’t want to be the kid who seems sad but no one knows why.

Sometimes when we think of ourselves, we can only see the tragedy or the challenges that we have had. We can’t seem to grasp hold of Jesus’ grace and forgiveness and resurrection. My nephew didn’t say anything about his dog on the first day, but on the second day he said everyone was quiet at lunch and he shared about his dog. Everyone was kind and loving to him. Our wounds are a part of who we are and our scars carry us forward. We all have scars.

I remember when I was a pastor in England there was an older woman who had polio as a child and had used forearm crutches her entire life. Watching her walk looked so painful. But she walked up the aisle and knelt down on the altar rail for Communion wincing as she did. She would kneel in prayer for a long time and then with pain on her face she would stand up. I asked her once what she prayed for and she said, “For the strength for one more day.” She was in so much pain but she knew that God was with her.

We bring to God our own frailty and brokenness - felt not just in physical illness, but in guilt, anxiety and all the burdens which weigh us down. We also bring our concerns for others and for the world. We come to God who knows our needs before we ask, and whose love revealed in Jesus Christ is stronger than suffering and death.

Have you ever noticed that the windshield of your car is so big and the rearview mirror is so small? It is good to glance back once in a while, but we have to look forward to get to where we need to go. Jesus is calling us forward. Our hurts, mistakes, sorrows, and regrets have marked us and they may describe us but they do not define us. We are God’s beloved children. Jesus’ resurrection assures us that God’s love is more powerful than our tragedies and that the future is always open.[[3]](#footnote-3)

After you receive the bread and the juice from Communion, I want to invite you to receive a blessing of healing to remind yourself that you are a beloved child of God. Misty Farris and I will be at the front to anoint you with oil making the sign of the cross on your forehead. Anointing the forehead with oil points to the healing love of God. Many people find prayer, and also Holy Communion, laying on of hands, and anointing with oil to be healing.

We are all hurting in different ways. Some of us have illness or injury, some of us have damaged or broken relationships, and some of us have traumatic memories, or guilt or estrangement from God. Today is an opportunity for us to share the pain. As we share our own distress, we are expressing compassion, hope, grace, and our faith in God. We come seeking salvation and wholeness. May it be a reminder that suffering should never be done alone. May it be a reminder that we are marked by the presence of God, always.

1. Bowler, Kate. Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I’ve Loved. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bowler, Kate. Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I’ve Loved. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.davidlose.net/2017/03/lent-4-a-the-man-who-now-sees/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)