

## "Come Down, Lord"

Sickness is something we all face, isn't it. It's part of being a human being. It's part of living in a fallen world. We're vulnerable to illness. The COVID pandemic has made us even more aware of this.

Jesus came as a Healer. The gospels are filled with stories of His healings. When we read the Book of Acts in the New Testament we see that the early church continued Jesus' ministry of miraculous healings.

The Scripture read today from John, chapter 4, is a story of healing and of Jesus' power to heal. Let's look at this story. "Once more he (Jesus) visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death" (John 4:46-47).

A man came to Jesus, begging him to heal his sick son. He's a "royal official". The Greek word is "basilikos". It means "king's officer". This man apparently held a high position under King Herod. He comes to Jesus and *begs* Him to heal his son, who is back home, seriously ill and close to death.

Jesus' response to this worried and desperate father is rather shocking: "'Unless you people see signs and wonders,' Jesus told him, 'you will never believe'" (verse 48). That seems so rude! Jesus says, unless you people (plural) see signs and wonders, you won't believe! Apparently, others were around. Maybe a crowd had gathered. Curiosity seekers? Only looking for Jesus to do something that will dazzle them? There are some of us today who are only interested in God and Jesus when we need something badly. If Jesus can only bail us out of a situation, or keep us safe when we're in danger, or give us a miracle. We only want God for what we can get out of Him. Or, the only way we'll believe is if God does for us exactly what we want.

But the father is not deterred: "Sir, come down, before my child dies" (John 4:49). Jesus says, Go, your son will live (verse 50). And at that moment, the son is healed!

The setting for this story is the village of Cana. My wife Nancy and I once hosted a tour to the Holy Lands. One of the days as we were riding on the bus our tour guide pointed out the village of Cana. It was just a tiny speck in the distance. Apparently there was not enough there to warrant our stopping! But in the gospel of John, some pretty amazing things happened in the village of Cana!

John writes that this healing miracle took place in Cana, *where earlier Jesus had turned water into wine*. Remember that event? Jesus and His disciples were at a wedding, and the bride and groom ran out of wine for their guests. In that culture it would have been a shameful embarrassment. Jesus instructs the servants to fill 6 huge water pots with water, then turns that water into wine. John makes it a point to say that it became *choice* wine, the *best* wine possible.

John's gospel is packed with *symbolism*. John loves to convey the message of Jesus and God's truth by using symbolism. Turning ordinary water into exquisite wine suggests that Jesus offers *abundant life*. Jesus adds joy and color to life!

So, John no doubt deliberately mentions that this miracle took place in Cana. Now once again, Jesus is presented with a challenge. Something throws a dark cloud over the joyful life God intended: *a young boy is desperately ill and near death. And Jesus restores life and wholeness to this child.*

***God wills wholeness for us.*** Jesus treated disease as an enemy – part of the realm of evil. Jesus never said God makes people sick. Nowhere is it recorded in Scripture that Jesus turned somebody away and refused to heal them by saying, "I'm sorry, God wants you to be sick."

But you say, "Well, if God wants wholeness for us, how come He allows people to be sick? If God wants us to be well, why doesn't He heal everyone for whom we pray? These are profound questions, and we don't have all the answers. There are many reasons why people get sick. And we can't fully understand why everyone we pray for isn't healed. But I believe Jesus' teaching and Jesus' actions indicate that God wills wholeness for His children. *And there are many wonderful accounts today of persons who are healed when people pray and have faith in God's power to heal.*

In our in-person worship services at Community United Methodist Church we generally set aside time in our service the first Sunday of each month to have prayers for healing, and anointing with oil. This is not just for *physical* healing. There are many ways we can be sick and dysfunctional, and in need of God's healing (such as healing of relationship, mental and emotional healing, healing of life hurts, spiritual healing, etc.). While we can never guarantee that everyone will be healed when we pray, I've seen many examples of God's healing take place in these services.

Maybe you need a healing from God today (actually, all of us probably have some area of our life that could benefit from Jesus' touch of healing).

The gospel writer John highlights the little village of Cana as a place where Jesus performed at least 2 miracles. Just as Jesus saves a newly married couple the humiliation of running out of wine for their guests by changing ordinary water into exquisite wine, Jesus spares a father the anguish of losing a child by healing his son.

Let's just examine a few details of this healing story in John's gospel. ***First of all, the father really wanted Jesus to heal his son.*** "When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death" (John 4:47). This dad travels to Cana, which is about 20 miles from Capernaum, where the sick boy was. 20 miles is an easy drive for us; back then it represented a long journey. The father *begs* Jesus to heal his boy. He's a prominent official, with status, and he begs the Lord for this. Serious illness has a way of reducing us all to beggars, doesn't it!

A desire for healing is so important if healing is to take place. You say, "Doesn't everyone want to get well?" Not necessarily! There's a story in the next chapter of John where Jesus asks a man who has been paralyzed for years, "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6). Sometimes people would rather be ill! They can get attention, get pity. Perhaps avoid having to face responsibilities that they don't want, or are afraid of. We may have mental health issues, or personality defects or character flaws that we know we need to address and change, but we just don't want to be healed enough to do something about it. *This father ached to have his desperately ill son made well again.*

***Then, Jesus simply spoke a word and healing followed.*** "'Go,' Jesus replied, 'your son will live'" (John 4:50). He didn't scream or holler or have everybody in a wild frenzy. He didn't even have to travel the 20 miles to the bedside. He just spoke the word. That's the power of Jesus! Jesus is bigger than any illness we face. All things are possible with God.

***Also, the boy's father believed in Jesus' power to heal.*** "The man took Jesus at his word and departed" (John 4:50b). He wasn't offended that Jesus didn't even offer to go to the boy's bedside. He didn't think healing was impossible because the sick child was 20 miles away. He apparently wasn't insulted that Jesus didn't seem to make a big fuss over him because he was a high ranking official. He just trusted Jesus at His word, and *left for home!* *I wish I could trust Jesus like that, don't you!*

Faith is an important ingredient in our quest for God's healing. Now faith is not the only factor that determines whether or not a healing takes place. I've known instances where people had great faith, and yet physical healing didn't happen. *It's so important not to lay a guilt trip on people when this happens! Like we condemn ourselves for not having enough faith.* And the Bible tells of healing miracles taking place where there's no mention of anyone having faith! Faith isn't the only factor involved in whether or not healing happens. However, it seems that healing is more likely to take place *in an atmosphere of faith* (as someone has said). Faith on the part of the *sick person* helps. I think doctors would concur that there is a better chance of a person being healed if he or she has a positive attitude and believes that healing is possible. Faith on the part of *those praying* is also important. *The father had faith to believe Jesus when He said that his son would be healed.*

Look at what happens on the dad's way home! "While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, 'Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him.' Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live'" (John 4:51-53). The man's servants met him on his way home to relay to him the great news that the boy was healed. And when they compared notes, they discovered that the boy took a turn for the better at the exact time Jesus spoke the word for him to be healed!

This reminds me of an incident that happened in a church I served. I've told this story before, but let me just share it again. Early in my ministry I pastored a church in Tower City, PA. In that

congregation was a young woman, a mother of 3 young children. She was very ill, with many health problems, including cancer. I visited her in the hospital one day. She was having a terrible day. I could tell she was in agony. She looked very pale. She said she wasn't able to keep anything down, not even water. I wondered how long she would be alive.

It was either that night (or the next evening), we had our weekly prayer and study group in the church. I told them of Bonnie's desperate condition. Before we prayed, I felt led to do something a bit different. Thinking we needed a boost of faith, I turned in the Scripture to some verses that meant a lot to me. The verses were Matthew 18:19-20, where Jesus gave a prayer promise to His disciples. "Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven, for where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

I read this Scripture to the group and said, "Let's claim this promise!" As I put my head down to pray, I happened to glance at my watch and noticed the time (I think it was like 8:10 p.m.). We prayed, and I felt no particular emotion at all.

The next day I went to the hospital and into this lady's room. There she was – no longer in bed, but sitting on a chair! She greeted me with a wide grin, and I said, "What in the world happened to you!" "Well," she said, "I'll tell you. Last night I was feeling awful. For some reason I reached over to the table beside my hospital bed and picked up my New Testament. I picked no particular spot – just opened it at random – and read a few verses, and they helped me."

I said, "Do you remember what you read?" She said, "Well, I don't remember exactly, but it said something about where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, or something like that. I replied, "Was it this one?"...and I got the Bible and read the passage that we had read the evening before in our prayer group. She said, "That's it! That's the one!" And she continued, "After I read that, believe it or not I began to feel better. I was able to drink something last night, and I've been able to start to eat some light food." I said, "Bonnie, do you by any chance remember about what time it was when this happened?" She said, "You know, I just happened to look at my watch. It was 8:10" At the very time we were reading Matthew 18:19-20, she had randomly turned to that Scripture and was reading it too. And a healing took place! By the way, I went back to that church 30 years later for a funeral, and guess who I saw: Bonnie!

There is a wonderful conclusion to the story of Jesus healing the little boy. John writes: "So he and his whole household believed" (John 4:53). This man and his family became followers of Jesus as a result of this healing! *Physical healing is not enough!* The most important healing that can take place is the healing we need in our relationship with God. Salvation! Forgiveness of our sins. The re-orienting of our life away from self and towards Christ and His will.

Back in the 1970's folk music was pretty popular. There was a group of Roman Catholic nuns called the Medical Mission Sisters who wrote and sang religious folk tunes. They wrote a song kind of based on this Scripture. It's a simple song called, "Come Down, Lord."

*"Come down, Lord, my son is ill    Wracked with fever the livelong day  
He is life to me, if You will    Drive death away, drive death away*

*Lord, do not come to my house, I'm unworthy    Speak and the promise is sealed  
For when your word, oh God is spoken    He shall be healed, he shall be healed*

*Come down, Lord, my soul is ill    Wracked with anguish the livelong day  
All my sorrowing will be still    If You but say, if You but say*

*Lord, do not come to my house, I'm unworthy    Speak and the promise is sealed  
For when your word, oh God is spoken    I shall be healed, I shall be healed*

*Come down, Lord, the world is ill    Wracked with bloodshed the live long day  
Man must struggle for peace until    You show the way, You show the way*

*Lord, do not come to our house, we're unworthy    Speak and the promise is sealed  
For when your word, oh God is spoken    We shall be healed, we shall be healed."*

In so many ways we need the Lord's healing: in our bodies, in our souls, in our world.  
Come down, Lord. Please come down!

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