

“The Larger Scope of Healing”

What do you think of when you hear the words “heal”, or “healing”? My guess would be you think of doctors, nurses, hospitals. Someone recovering from a physical illness, or surgery. And all of those things *are* associated with the words “heal” and “healing”. This is probably what comes to mind when we have our healing services. Having our physical bodies healed. Even on Sundays when we don’t have the healing emphasis, in our morning prayer time, many (perhaps most) of our prayer requests are for people who are *physically ill*. And there’s nothing wrong with that! *But it doesn’t go far enough!*

There’s more to the healing ministry of Jesus, and the healing ministry of any congregation, than just the healing of our sick bodies! To understand this, we’re going to look at a section of the Gospel of Luke, chapter 8. Chapter 8 begins: “Soon afterwards, (Jesus) went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1).

All of Jesus’ ministry took place against the backdrop of the kingdom of God – that God’s kingdom, God’s visible rule, was breaking into this world. Jesus began His ministry with these words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15). The time has arrived. God’s kingdom, God’s rule, is dawning on the world.

Jesus’ whole ministry was a sign that the kingdom of God was near. His preaching. His teaching. His miracles or mighty works. His healings. Matthew 4:23 says this: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.” Notice it mentions Jesus’ teaching, preaching, and healing. When Jesus sent His disciples out, He gave them power and authority to do the same. The beginning of the next chapter in Mark, chapter 9 says, “Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (Mark 9:1-2). Again, they taught, they preached the kingdom, they healed!

We see all of these signs of the kingdom being played out in Luke, chapter 8. We’ll look at 4 events that give us a composite picture of Jesus’ ministry, and how it involved more than just the healing of people’s bodies. First of all, *Jesus calms the storm.* (Luke 8:22-25).

Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat. Jesus is tired after a busy day of teaching. He falls asleep. Meanwhile a sudden storm comes up – typical for the Sea of Galilee. The storm is so severe that these men are terrified. In panic mode, they wake Jesus up and scream, “We’re all going to drown!” Luke writes that Jesus “rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm” (Luke 8:24). The terrified disciples are awe-struck. “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the waves, and they obey him” (Luke 8:25).

We may ask: What does this story have to do with healing? Where it says Jesus *rebuked* the wind and the water, this is the same word Jesus spoke in certain healings. In Matthew 17:18, Jesus “*rebuked* the demon” in a boy and the demon came out of the lad. In Mark 9:25, Jesus

“*rebuked* the unclean spirit” in another boy. In Luke 4:39, Jesus “*rebuked* the fever” in Simon Peter’s mother-in-law. So, Jesus, the Son of God, “rebukes” and calms the winds and the waves – He heals this disruption in nature, much as He heals sick bodies!

In Romans, chapter 8, it says that nature, creation, is longing for that final day, when God’s kingdom comes, and nature itself will be calm and peaceful. As a sign that God’s kingdom was near, Jesus attacked the disruptive forces of nature and calmed them – just as He healed sick bodies.

Next, Jesus casts out a demon in a man. Luke 8:26-39. Jesus and His disciples get out of the boat, and are met by this man who is demon-possessed. He’s out of control, a half-human, raving madman. He lived among tombs. He goes around naked. Even when people chained him, he just broke the chains. Jesus eventually gives the demons permission to exit the man and go into a herd of swine nearby.

As a sign that God’s kingdom is breaking in, Jesus casts out demons. Jesus once said to the scribes and Pharisees, “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, *then the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (Matthew 12:28).

Many people today explain away demon-possession by just saying these are mentally ill people, that people back then didn’t know anything about mental illness. These demon possessed people were just mentally ill: dysfunctional, psychotic, insane. Without devoting a whole sermon on the subject of demon-possession, let me just say I believe that mental illness is real, but so is demon-possession. The biblical writers, and Jesus, were not stupid, primitive, unenlightened. There are supernatural forces of evil that sometimes get a hold of people. Perhaps the most publicized case of demon possession was a boy in the Washington D.C. area who had a demon cast out of him – this case formed the basis of the movie *The Exorcist*. Jesus’ healing ministry included casting out demons, and freeing people from demonic possession. And that was a sign that God’s kingdom was breaking in.

Next story: Jesus cures a woman who was hemorrhaging. Luke 8:41-48. “Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped” (Luke 8:41-44). Jesus feels power flowing out from Him. He says, “Who touched me?” The disciples chuckle: “All the people crowding around you, and you say ‘Who touched Me!’” The lady’s embarrassed. Some health problems you just don’t want to advertise! Jesus instantly heals this lady who’s been bleeding for 12 long years! He tells her: “Your faith has made you well” – literally, “Your faith has *saved* you.”

Jesus healing her physical ailment is one of the signs that God’s kingdom and rule is beginning. The salvation of the world is in motion!

One more story: Jesus restores life to a young girl who has died. Luke 8:49-56. The girl is the daughter of a synagogue leader named Jairus. His daughter is 12. Jairus had approached Jesus and begged Him to heal his sick daughter, but by the time Jesus arrived at her house, she had died. Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed” (Luke 8:50). And she is brought back to life again! As God’s kingdom and rule are breaking into the world, even death is robbed of its power to chain us!

Are you beginning to get a larger perspective on Jesus’ healing? God’s rule is beginning to break into this world with the coming of Jesus. As signs of that, Jesus exercises power and healing over nature....demons...physical illness.....and even death!

So, what does all of this mean for us? Here are some implications, in no particular order.

Physical illness is a part of the realm of evil that God’s kingdom will overcome. Jesus attacked illness as an enemy of God’s good will and purpose for our lives. Yet, there are still some people who believe that God sends illnesses on us.

Oral Roberts had a healing ministry for many years. He told of how as a young boy he was bedfast with tuberculosis. He writes: “One day some people came who said God had tracked me down. God had put this disease on me. They were really turning me off because I wasn’t a Christian. Here they were telling me God has put tuberculosis on me. And it gave me a terrible view of God...pretty soon my mother got stirred up and she said to the leader of this group, ‘The devil afflicted my son. God didn’t do this to my boy. God loves my son. God is good. And if you can’t say something good, I think you ought to leave.’”

“When they left (my mother) came in and sat down beside my bed. She said, ‘Oral, God’s not like these people say He is. Sure, maybe the afflictions have made you stop and think, but they didn’t come from the Lord. The Lord wants to heal you and give you life.’”

Acts 10:38 says Jesus “went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil.” Illness is part of the reign of evil. Jesus attacked it as an enemy. When God’s kingdom *fully comes*, there will be no more sickness, no more pain.

Next point: Since God’s kingdom has not yet come fully, physical healing is not always guaranteed when we seek it. The question that always comes up is: How come some people are healed when we pray, and others are not healed (at least, physically)? There is no complete answer this side of eternity. *There are many reasons why people are sick, and there are many factors involved that play into whether one is healed or not.*

Here is something I’ve found helpful. We live at the juncture of 2 kingdoms. This age, a fallen world where there is sin and sickness, decay and death. But then there is the age to come, when God will rule completely. We live at the intersection of these two realms. There are times when the powers of the kingdom are strongly evident: the Spirit of God is present, healings take place, miracles happen, people are freed from sins. The figure below visualizes this reality.



We see this clearly in the first century church – especially the Book of Acts.

But we're not there yet. We still live in a fallen world. Evil is not vanquished yet. Praying for healing. Holding healing services. Having faith. Drawing close to God and His Spirit – these are all important. Healings do happen. Miracles do take place! One of the gifts of the Spirit is healing: some are gifted to pray for the sick, and see healings take place. But there's no guarantee. Our task is to seek healing, pray for healing, and trust God no matter what.

This leads me to the last point I want to make: *God's healing is much broader in scope than just physical healing.* God wants to heal and deliver us from *all* of the evil and destructive things in our lives. For instance, the most important healing in our life is healing in our relationship with God! For us to be saved – to be forgiven of our sins, brought back into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus. We can pray for someone to be healed *physically*. And it's a wonderful thing when that happens. But if that person is still far from God, hostile towards the gospel or simply not interested in spiritual things, *is that real healing?*

There are so many ways we can be sick and dysfunctional. We can have sick attitudes, destructive addictions and habits. We can have a miserable personality (negative, critical), we can have low self-esteem, a poor self-image. We can need healing and deliverance from lying, cheating, sexual sins.

Since all of Jesus' healing ministry was related to the breaking in of God's kingdom, God's rule on earth, the essence of healing is that we want God's kingdom, God's rule, to be done on earth, and in our lives! Even if our bodies are miraculously healed, if we still want our will to be done rather than God's will to be done, we have a long way to go to be healed!

So, we will continue to have healing services here at Community UMC. We'll pray that God's Spirit will be present...that the powers of the incoming kingdom will be manifest here in this place. We will pray for healing, for miracles - that as we live at the juncture of these 2 realms (the fallen world, the incoming kingdom), that the powers of the age to come will be here.

But I believe no sincere prayers are wasted. Even if physical healing does not happen, we can be whole in our relationship with God, in our character and personality, in our relationships with other people. And if we're in Christ and believe in Him and are following Him, we have that promise of the greatest healing of all – overcoming death and living forever in His kingdom!

