



Summer Preaching Series: Questions of Faith

Does God Heal Today?



A Sermon By
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September 3, 2017
Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

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Our summer preaching series, Questions of Faith, concludes this morning as we address the question, “Does God heal today?” In short, yes. It is in God’s nature to heal. The word “heal” means to make whole. God is a god of wholeness and God wants us to experience wholeness in our lives. But let me clarify, being healed, doesn’t always mean being cured. Nor does it mean being spared hardships. While God desires our wholeness and well-being, that desire doesn’t mean that we are immune to sickness or suffering. We know all too well that we are not immune to these things. We know the affliction and anguish of brokenness in our lives. We know disease, oppression, and even death. If we haven’t experienced these things, personally or peripherally, we will. But even in the midst of any brokenness we experience, God can still bring about our healing, our wholeness. After all, that’s what God is all about – bringing wholeness out of brokenness, joy from despair, light out of darkness, and life out of death. It is in God’s nature to heal.

Holy Scripture attests to God’s proclivity for healing. In the Old Testament, God is described as one who heals. The book of Exodus, a few chapters after the story of Moses and the burning bush, relates another account in which Moses and God speak to one another. On this occasion, God tells Moses, “...I am the Lord who heals you” (Ex. 15:26), reassuring Moses that God will continue to care for him and the Hebrew people. Similarly, the psalmist describes God as someone who “heals the broken and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3). God heals people who are broken by sickness, disease, pain and every kind of oppression.

Sometimes, in the scriptures, God heals in miraculous ways that we don’t understand and that we can’t explain. But more often than not, God uses people to bring about healing wholeness to those who are broken. This is especially true in the case of Jesus. Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection revealed God’s desire for creation’s wholeness, health and life. Jesus told his followers that he came that they might have life and have it more abundantly. Jesus testified to God’s nature. He taught about God’s kingdom as a place of expansiveness, a place of abundance, a place of wholeness.

Jesus didn’t just speak about this place; he began to bring it about, through his words and actions. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that “Jesus went though Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (Mt. 4:23). 25% of the Gospel narrative focuses on accounts of healing done by Jesus. Jesus was a man of compassion and action. He saw people’s brokenness, their suffering, and he did something about it. He healed them. He made them whole. He showed the people a glimpse of the Kingdom of God to come. He showed them the wholeness God intends for creation.

And, he empowered his followers to do likewise. During his earthly ministry, before his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus sent his disciples out to the towns and villages and gave them authority to heal in his name (Mk. 6:7-13). And they did! The gospel of Mark tells us that the disciples “cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and cured them” (Mk. 6:13). Jesus and his followers sought to heal any and all forms of brokenness that tormented the people they encountered, giving them a glimpse of the wholeness God intends for us, giving them a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven.

After his resurrection, Jesus commissioned his followers to continue the ministry that he began with them (Lk. 28:19-20a). They were to witness to the good news they experienced. They were to teach, preach, heal and live in Jesus' name. And Jesus promised them that he would be with them, and us, always, to the end of the age (Lk. 28:20b). Jesus' mission, the Christian mission, continued through his early followers and continues through the ages in his followers still. We, you and I, are to teach, preach, live and bring healing in Jesus' name. We are commissioned to bring wholeness and healing, those glimpses of God's kingdom, to all we meet.

That is one of the ways that God heals today. I believe that God still heals in miraculous and mysterious ways, that I don't fully understand, but more often than not, God heals through us. There are many types of healing, because there are many types of brokenness. Some brokenness is physical in nature, like disease and sickness. Other types of brokenness are emotional, mental, or spiritual in nature. Healing can take many different forms because there are so many kinds of brokenness that our world experiences. We are called as followers of Jesus, to bring good news and wholeness to these broken places.

I've seen this happen in a very tangible way over the past week in my hometown of Houston, Texas. I've seen it on TV, but more powerfully, I've heard it from my friends and family. During Hurricane Harvey's flooding, ordinary, exhausted, pressed to the edge, people lined up as human chains in filthy, rushing, waist-high water to pull people out of submerged vehicles. They came from hundreds of miles with boats and at their own expense, using vacation days, to pluck strangers from rooftops. They gave money and clothing and food and blood and in some cases their very lives. And now in the immediate aftermath of the storm, this compassionate kindness continues. Strangers are helping strangers, people are feeding one another. They're helping to muck out damaged homes, lending a hand, lending an ear, lending their hearts.

My parents, who were spared water damage to their home, joined members of their church community over the past few days, to help those who were not so fortunate. They've sorted through goods, washed clothes soaked in floodwater, prepared meals, doled out hugs and comfort. And they are finding healing. Likewise, the folks they're helping are finding healing. They're finding it together. These actions and encounters are bringing healing to the broken and wholeness to the devastated.

My sisters and brothers, God uses us to heal. As Christians, we are called to be a source of healing love to others. We are never more like God than when we help others. When we restore the broken, bring good news, lift up the fallen. In this broken, hurting, divided world, we are called to bring healing. St. Teresa of Ávila, a 16th century Christian mystic wrote, "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

God does heal today – in miraculous ways that I don't fully understand. But God also heals in more ordinary ways – through people – just as God healed through Jesus' early followers, through Jesus' himself and before that through other people who followed and feared God. We are God's hands and feet in our world. We are called to bring healing to the broken. God heals through us – through presence, compassion, kindness and good news. Christ has no body now on earth but yours and mine. So, let us work to bring about the healing of our broken world. Amen.