

Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

Sermon

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Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

1225 Piper Boulevard, Naples, FL 34110

A Time to Heal

Mark 1:29-39

I suppose I should have titled this sermon, A Time to Heal and A Time to Move On. But that seemed a bit too long for a title. Still, it's clear from that Scripture reading that Jesus had other things in mind besides healing people. Even so, people came to him for healing. And quite often, he healed them.

Last week, by the power of a spoken word, Jesus healed a man in the Synagogue who was possessed by an unclean spirit. Today Jesus reaches out, taking Peter's mother-in-law by the hand, raising her up, healing her with a touch. What do you know! Jesus has power over physical as well as spiritual ailments. After that the whole town gathered at door bringing with them all who were sick or possessed. And he healed them.

People still come to Jesus for healing. And I'm not talking only of spiritual healing. When we're sick or grieving we turn to prayer. We ask God to guide the hands of doctors and nurses in times of hospitalization. We ask for patience in times of sickness or recovery. Makes no difference whether we have broken bones, broken hearts, or broken spirits, people still turn to Jesus for healing. And we have been healed.

But was Jesus called to be a healer? We seem to take his healing ministry for granted. Even those among us most skeptical of faith healing generally assume that Jesus was a healer, with power to return sight to the blind, to raise even the dead to new life. And yet, here in this story we see Jesus going off to pray early in the morning. And when his disciples find him, telling him of all the people who are looking for him, he says simply, Let's move on so I can preach the message to others. That's what I came out to do. Clearly Jesus was resolved to preach the gospel to others.

Seems rather cold on Jesus' part, doesn't it? I mean what difference does a day or two make? You'd think he could go back to Capernaum, heal the folks there and then move on. But no! Jesus was determined to move on. Jesus seems to be saying no hanging up a shingle that reads, "Healer." Later according to the Gospel of John, Jesus said no to being made "King." There was something about turning back that Jesus saw as a problem, something about being known only as a healer that got in the way of his being the Messiah.

For those of us who find ourselves looking for healing, searching for Jesus with those in Capernaum, we can't help but wonder. Where is he when you need him? Imagine that after years of sickness you've heard of a healer who can finally change your life. Imagine seeking him out only to learn that he has moved on. But surely he's the Son of God, we say. Surely he's the holy one sent to save us. Where is he when we need him?

I suspect that most of us have at one time or another set in one direction only to be faced with a decision. Do we turn back or keep going? We set out on a particular quest or mission only to have to pause and reflect on whether it's the right thing for us to do. Consider the church that decides to feed homeless people only to be slapped with a zoning violation by the authorities. Should that church go to court or back down? What about the church that calls for changes in community governance? How many people object to churches getting involved in politics? Some churches

nowadays are embroiled in controversy because they've taken a stand on such matters as the inclusion of Gays and Lesbians in the church leadership. Again, you know there's disagreement among the members over that issue. Some will wonder if taking a stand is worth all the turmoil. Jesus came to preach good news, but healing seemed to be taking up all his time. So Jesus faced a difficult decision. Should he turn back and continue healing people or should he keep his face forward, continuing the course of action he feels called to pursue?

No wonder he went off alone to pray. Decisions like that are not easy for anyone. Interestingly, he went to a deserted place to pray. Can't help but make the connection with the wilderness where, according to Mark, he was tempted only a few days earlier. Remember Mark doesn't fill in the blanks about the temptations of Jesus like Matthew and Luke do. Mark may be more subtle than they. Here we see Jesus praying in the wilderness, wrestling it appears with his calling. Shall he heal the people? Or shall he preach? Is there a time to heal and a time to move on? For Jesus his prayer time may be a time for healing, a time to settle in his own mind, what is the will of God for him. He comes away resolved to move on, to preach the good news. That's why I came out, he says.

But what happens next? We didn't read that part of the Scripture, but before he could get to the next town, a leper approached him and asked to be healed. "If you will, you can make me clean," he told Jesus. So, Jesus, what's it going to be? Will you pass by this needy one or will you stop to tend to his needs? You know the answer. Moved with pity, the Scripture says, Jesus said to him, "I will; be clean." No sooner than he resolves to leave the healing ministry behind, Jesus finds himself once again reaching out to touch and to heal. But we know now that there's more to Jesus' than simply healing. And that's the issue facing us today as we consider this Scripture.

When Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law at the beginning of this passage, he did not merely heal her fever. Mark says Jesus raised her up. Interesting choice of words. Raised up is what the angel in the tomb told the women about Jesus that first Easter morning. Mark is telling us that properly understood, Jesus' healing is like resurrection, like raised up into a new life. Peter's mother-in-law was raised, not from death, but from her old life. She was raised into a new life where she ministered to them. There's another interesting choice of words. Jesus didn't raise her up so she could go fix him dinner, as some are inclined to say. He raised her up to minister to others, to care for them as a deacon cares for the poor and needy.

Jesus' power to heal, to raise people up to new life, transforms us into ministers who reach out to help others in their times of need. The new age into which we have been raised is an age grounded in love for God and love for one another. To use another phrase, we are born again, not to serve ourselves, but to serve others in Christ's name. Peter's mother-in-law is one key to our understanding. She was raised up to a new life of service in Christ's name.

We too have been touched by Jesus, raised up from our old life into a new one. There's much to draw us back to the old ways. We could go back, healed but not transformed. Or with Jesus we can be filled with new resolve. There is a time to be healed and a time to move on. We're called by God to help others around the world, to be peacemakers. It may even involve our suffering as Jesus did, that others may have life and have it abundantly. There is no straight path to the Promised Land, no peace without hard work. No true healing without transformation. Let's go, Jesus said. Be healed and move on, following me.