

HIS HEALINGS

Scripture Lesson: Mathew 4

Text: Luke 8:50

Songs: R504

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

All of us heard one dimension of healing in the Children's Message tonight.

On the opposite end of the healing spectrum are the many ethical issues that surround medical care today. Recently the Grand Rapids denominational leaders asked a number of us for advice. To my surprise, a week later I received a book as a token of appreciation for giving that advice. Calvin College Philosophy Professor Ruth Groenhout wrote the book. The title is Bioethics: A Reformed Look at Life and Death Choices. While I have not yet read the entire book, Dr. Groenhout asks provocative questions about the use of life support, selling sperm and buying human eggs. She wonders about the morality of those who can afford excellent health care and those left without it. Her questions are central in the current debate in our nation now. In the final paragraph of the preface she writes, "The book won't answer all your questions about health care—in fact, it may leave with you with more questions than when you started!" Indeed, Christians must ask and answer many more questions about health and healing than non-Christians because we confess we are made, each of us individually, by our Creator God. That lays a huge burden of responsibility on us. No wonder Professor Groenhout ends her introduction to the book with these words. "Scripture calls us to be wise. In the area of bioethics, a large part of wisdom is recognizing the complexities of our world so that we don't offer simplistic answers to complicated questions. It's our hope this book will generate the kind of discussion that leads to the beginning of wisdom about bioethics." Many of you teens here tonight will be involved in such discussions.

While we appreciate books like that, it is more important for Christians to be guided by the Bible. During this season of Lent we are seeking to know the Savior better by some of the stellar things He did. We looked at His miracles and His parables. For each we asked what they were, why He did them, and what wonderful results do they provide us today. We want to keep those questions in our minds as we look at what Jesus did first, how they made Him famous, and how fortunate are healed people back then and today. So let's journey with Jesus.

Our Scripture Lesson is Mathew 4. There are three things about this chapter that we should notice together.

First, these are the opening events of Jesus' ministry. The chapter records the temptations by Satan in the desert that showed Jesus was ready to meet His match. He could and would overcome Satan. The chapter explains how He began to preach. It records who He called to be His first disciples. The chapter presents "Firsts" in Jesus' ministry, even before His famous Sermon on the Mount. Among those "Firsts" are His healings.

Second, notice the comprehensive cure that Jesus gives. As the perfect Son of God and Son of Man He leaves people completely healed without any of the ethical issues that arise with contemporary medical care. Verse 24 gives us a glimpse of the scope of His mastery over illness. "Matthew 4:24." In The Message Eugene Petersen captures that this way, "People brought anybody with an ailment, whether mental, emotional, or physical. Jesus healed them one and all." Jesus' healing ministry cured each person perfectly. Jesus was a true healer.

Third, this sort of healing attracted crowds. Remember how verse 24 begins? "News about Him spread all over Syria." This concluding paragraph of the chapter ends this way, "Matthew 4:25." This made Jesus' famous.

His healing ministry attracted the crowds. Jesus primary purpose for coming into this world was not to heal the sick, but it brought people to Jesus so they could hear His message of God's justice and love, of hell and heaven, of promises broken by sin but kept perfectly by God. This is the gospel, the good news from God.

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In the attention getting miracles, parables, and now healings, Jesus ministry both reveals and conceals who He is. He revealed enough of Himself for us to believe and He concealed enough of Himself so there would be people who called for His crucifixion. During Lent we have seen how miracles, parables, and now healings are masterfully orchestrated by Jesus to allow just the right amount of self-disclosure. Christians can see enough of Him to know He is the Savior, but He was not so overwhelming that no one was left to accomplish His supreme sacrifice as the Lamb of God on Calvary's cross. The miracles made Jesus famous so we have faith in Him, yet He was not so famous that all people revered Him so no one would crucify Him. That is His self-disclosure.

In that light consider what Jesus said to Jairus in our text tonight, "Luke 8:50." Jairus daughter was deathly ill—and died. Jesus brought her back to life in the greatest healing miracle possible. What life-lessons did Jesus teach Jairus and his family? In Jesus' short sentence He taught three things. First, do not be afraid. When God is present, we never need to fear. Second, just believe. Just believe that God is able and willing to heal. Our spiritual forefathers in the Heidelberg Catechism taught, "Heidelberg Catechism, QA 26." Third, she will be healed. She is dead but she will be healed because God is here. Three life-lessons: No fear, great faith, fabulous results. That is always the way it was with the perfect healer, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have seen how Jesus' miracles were first and made Him famous. Now consider how fortunate to be healed by Jesus. Our reaction is that to be perfectly healed by Jesus is a most wonderful thing. Indeed, it is! To be perfectly healed by the perfect Healer is the greatest thing that could happen to a person. Since Jesus was and is the perfect healer, there are no complex ethical questions that need to be asked or answered as Ruth Groenhout writes in her bio-ethics book. Every healing of Jesus was a clean, obvious improvement for the person who had been ill. That was true of His physical healings, His emotional healings, and yes, even His spiritual healings. That is the clear Biblical record from Matthew 4, Luke 8:50, and any other healing passage in the life of Christ.

We saw last week that we should ask two questions of every Bible passage: So what happened and now what does it mean? So what, now what: A pretty simple formula for Bible reflection. We know what happened, perfect healing. Each person healed learned the three life-lessons: No fear, great faith, and fabulous results. What does that mean for us today? How should Christians view Jesus' healings in our time and in our lives? Let's look at the healing God does today through Jesus by the hands of the medical profession.

No fear? A large part of a pastor's ministry today is reducing fear in the face of illness, calming people with God's promises as they anticipate surgery . . . or a new medication . . . or chemotherapy . . . or death through hospice' door. That is why hospitals have chaplains and pastors know hospital corridors in the dark of night as well as the light of day as they help people through their own dark night of fear in the face of disease. That is exactly why Ruth Groenhout wrote her book. Facing illness with doctors who are under the Great Physician is nothing like facing illness in Jesus' personal presence. Yet Jairus feared, and so do we. Then we hear Jesus' calming voice, "Don't be afraid." As you face illness with Jesus, have no fear for He is the ultimate healer.

Great faith. Physical illness can—and very often does!—promote spiritual gain. When we face cancer, when a loved one has a heart attack, when there is a severe car accident, our prayers intensify. Some theologians speculate that God sends physical illness to develop spiritual strength. In that process, too, pastors are very active. We use the opportunities of illness to look beyond medical science to the true Physician, Jesus who healed perfectly. Our responsibility as fellow Christians to one another is to increase faith in the face of illness.

As long as we live on earth, there will be imperfect healing by an imperfect medical profession. For Christians every illness is an opportunity to experience Jesus' healing through the hands of doctors, nurses, health

professionals, and God's direct intervention. When doctors can do no more for us then we see the Perfect Healer face to face. That is ultimate, perfect healing Jesus practiced on earth. We shall be healed—forever!

Wrestle with the ethical issues around current medical practice. Speak out when the medical profession and government make un-Biblical choices. Keep pointing people to the Christ who healed perfectly—and still does.