

## **“What Does It mean to be Healed?”**

Date: Sept. 4, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: James 5:13-16; Matthew 10:1-8

Theme: Healing; Prayer

Occasion: Starting a Healing Service

An important part of the ministry of Jesus Christ was healing people. Jesus made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk and the dead to live again. Jesus healed people of leprosy. He cast out demons and forgave people of their sins. Not only that, Jesus gave the ministry of healing to his disciples, telling them to go out into the world - teaching, preaching and healing in His name.

More than 2,000 years have come and gone since Jesus walked on earth. Now-a-days when a person gets sick, or breaks a leg, or develops a seizure disorder, they go to see a doctor. Many times, but not always, the doctor is able to help the person to get well.

Some people, and I would say a minority, refuse to put their faith and trust in doctors or medicine, or any form of treatment that depends on human beings. They put their entire faith in God. Sometimes the courts will intervene and require parents to seek medical treatment for their child, when it's a case of life and death. The parents argue it is a violation of their religious rights.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that prayer is merely wishful thinking. They argue that if you're sick, you should seek proper medical help. For them, God has nothing to do with a person getting well. It all depends on the skill and wisdom of doctors and modern medicine.

On Wednesday of this week, our church is holding the first in a series of monthly healing services, to be held on the first Wednesday of the month. What can we expect from such a service? What does it mean to be healed? What is the purpose of prayer? Does God still do miracles?

First, let me say that our service on Wednesday is not going to be an Oral Roberts or Benny Hinn type of service. I make no claim to have the spiritual gift of healing. But the scriptures clearly say that if anyone is sick, they should seek the elders of the church and receive anointing and prayer. And so we will anoint and pray.

Some of the preachers who hold faith-healing services are quite sincere, and others are charlatans. I don't know whether the two men I mentioned before have the gift of healing or not. I do know that there are unscrupulous people who report to have the gift, who not only can't heal anyone but actually mislead others by having actors play the part of someone who is healed. Those preachers drive expensive cars and wear fancy rings and their healing services are quite emotional. I don't know about you, but I find myself "turned off" by such displays.

Our service on Wednesday night will be more of a prayer service. It will involve some singing, a time to praise and worship God. There will be a brief teaching. And then, those who would like to receive prayer are invited to come forward. As the Bible instructs us to, we will anoint them with oil, (without any fragrance for those who are allergic to them). We will lay hands on their head or shoulders, then pray for them and for their concerns. The service will end with prayer and perhaps a song. The rest is up to God.

Do I believe in miracles? Absolutely. There are times when a person's illness goes away and there is no natural explanation for it. We heard one of the leaders at the Red Bird Mission give his testimony, how his cancer was taken away from him, and he simply had to claim his healing. Praise be to God for such occurrences.

Rev. Betty Roach, who preached here at Lakewood two weeks ago, and who was at our planning session as we prepared for this first healing service asked me a

question. She said, “Bob, are you ready if a miracle happens.” I thought about it for a moment, and said, “I sure am. I certainly won’t take any credit for it. But to God be the glory.”

But is that the only way that God heals - in miraculous fashion? I don’t think so. Many times God heals using the tools of medicine. That doesn’t take away from the glory of God. Many times healing doesn’t happen instantaneously, but rather takes time. Still, to God be the glory. And sometimes when we pray, the thing that we ask for doesn’t materialize.

Does that mean that God didn’t hear us? Does it mean that we didn’t have enough faith? Should we have prayed louder, or longer? Is God testing us? Is the problem with us, or with God?

The truth is I can’t explain why some prayers are answered just the way we want them to be, and why other times the result of our prayers don’t get us what we asked for. I guess I can just tell you what I’ve learned over time. That is that God loves us no matter what happens to us. God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good. That is fundamental to my faith system. I have learned to trust in God, no matter what!

I’ve also learned that you don’t always get what you ask for. Perhaps there is a bigger plan that I don’t understand. I do know this - good people as well as evil people get sick and die. Every one of us will eventually die, from something. Some die young; some die old, but we all die, eventually. God is still good. God still loves us.

So what good is prayer? Why should we pray if we don’t always get what we ask for? I have come to believe that prayer is the on-going conversation that we have in our relationship with God. Prayer is not our telling God how the Almighty

should do his job. Prayer has more to do with changing us. Prayer is not trying to change God's mind. Prayer brings hope. Prayer brings courage. Prayer brings strength. Prayer changes our attitude, and our attitude helps us in our healing.

And another thing, healing is not always about our physical bodies. Many times we need healing in our relationships with other people. Not all healing has to do with the body. Often times healing has to do with our emotions, our memories, our attitudes. The greatest healing of all is the reconciliation between a person and God - the forgiveness of sin, the healing of the soul.

How is it with your soul? Are you perfectly at peace with God; there is nothing standing between you and the Lord? For the Christian, the basic purpose of spiritual healing is to renew and strengthen our relationship with the living Christ.

Healing is not magic. But underneath it is the great mystery of God's love. Those of us who will participate in the laying on of hands, the anointing with oil, and the saying of prayers, are simply channels of God's love. We come to these services of healing expecting to experience God's love. The results are left to Him. No one can predict what will happen in any given circumstance. But many people have reported many marvelous healings that have taken place in services such as this.

God does not promise that we shall be spared suffering. But God does promise to be with us in our suffering. Trusting that promise, we are enabled to recognize God's sustaining presence in pain, sickness, or injury. In the same way, God does not promise that we will be cured of an illness. A healing service is not necessarily a service of curing. But it does provide the atmosphere where healing can happen.

Prayer is powerful. I don't know how it works. But I know that it makes a

difference. I am always glad to offer prayer to a person who asks for it. And even if the person's condition isn't changed, they almost always report "I feel better now." Something happens when we pray. It is the work of God in our lives, the amazing work of God loving us. To God be the glory. Amen.