

February 16, 2025
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Jeremiah 17:5-10 and Luke 6:17-19
Who is Jesus? One Who Heals

As we move from Epiphany to Lent, we have been exploring the person and work of Jesus. Throughout the season of Advent and Christmas, Jesus was identified through words spoken by messengers of God – some angels, some people. Following his baptism, as Jesus began his ministry, he was identified by not only what others said about him and what he says about himself, but also his own actions. While we have seen Jesus perform signs – changing water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana, mostly we have heard others tell us of his ministry of teaching and healing. This morning, we hear more about Jesus’ work of healing and restoration. Next week on Youth Sunday, the youth will share about Jesus’ teaching ministry.

Our scripture this morning comes from the beginning of the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Luke. Most of us are more familiar with the Beatitudes ... “the blessed are...” from Matthew’s Gospel. Luke’s Gospel includes “woes to you” in addition to the “blessings.” This is in keeping with the ministry of Jesus we see displayed in Luke – a ministry that not only lifts up the poor and oppressed, but that will also bring down the rich and powerful from their thrones. The Beatitudes begin with this frame of Jesus’ ministry. Hear now these words from Luke chapter 6, verses 17-19:

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. **The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

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*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen
Nobody knows my sorrow
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen
Glory, Hallelujah*

*Sometimes I'm up, Sometimes I'm down
Oh, yes, Lord
Sometimes I'm almost to the ground
Oh, yes, Lord,
Oh, nobody knows the trouble I've seen.¹*

I can hear the people singing and chanting these words as they travel – walking for miles northward from Judea and Jerusalem and southward from the shores of Lebanon to the plateau in Galilee. All sorts of “troubles” weighing them down, all sorts of “sorrows” keeping them up at night. Yes, the crowds of people trekking to hear Jesus and touch him that day, they needed healing. Healing for things big and small, healing for things visible to others and conditions invisible to the naked eye, yet nonetheless things that kept them separated from others in the community. Yes, no one knew the spectrum and constellation of troubles the crowds faced that day. No one, that is except Jesus.

¹https://hymnary.org/text/sometimes_im_up_sometmes_im_down_oh_yes

Maybe Undine Smith Moore had a sense of the “troubles” too, as she was weaving together the spirituals we heard as part of the beautiful prelude this morning. Smith Moore, who was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for her oratorio *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr* based on the life of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., shared that as a child she never imagined becoming a composer, because of the disease of racism. She said: “One of the most evil effects of racism in my time was the limits it placed upon the aspirations of blacks, so that though I have been 'making up' and creating music all my life, in my childhood or even in college I would not have thought of calling myself a composer or aspiring to be one...all liberation is connected... as long as any segment of the society is oppressed... the whole society must suffer.”²

The crowds coming to Jesus knew that too. As long as any segment of the society is oppressed... the whole society suffers. There was a lot of suffering in Jesus’ day. There was a lot of suffering by the enslaved people who sang about their “troubles and sorrows” in the American south of the 1800’s, and there is a lot of suffering in our world today.

The crowds had come to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch Jesus, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

He healed all of them. All of the diseases, the unclean spirits, the troubles, and the sorrows. I wonder how many in that crowd had internalized that somehow the problem was them – not just with them – but they “themselves,” that their identity, who they were, was the problem.

In an article discussing the history of the spiritual “Nobody Knows the Trouble”, Professor C. Michael Hawn writes that “African American scholar and sociologist W.E.B. DuBois quotes the first two musical measures of “Nobody knows the trouble” at the beginning of the opening chapter in his famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. In this chapter, DuBois poses an unasked question that, though never posed aloud, is on the tips of the tongues of even well-meaning and compassionate people: “How does it feel to be a problem?”³

How does it feel to be *the* problem? How does it feel to go through life thinking that the reasons others are uncomfortable around you is that “you” are the problem? Not the disease or the physical limitation or the way you speak or the way you present yourself or the fill in the blank. But you. This is what Jesus came to heal...the unending separations of one person from another, the divisions that fractured families and communities.

²You can learn more about Undine Smith Moore at: <https://www.vermontpublic.org/programs/2021-03-22/timeline-undine-smith-moore-1904-1989>; and <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/undine-smith-moore-dean-black-women-composers/>

³ Quoted in: C. Michael Hawn. History of Hymns: 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I See.' *Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church*. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/history-of-hymns-nobody-knows-the-trouble-i-see>

There are a lot of healing stories in Bible. Sometimes these stories are referred to as miracles, with the touch of Jesus being the vehicle of healing. Sometimes it is the faith of the one healed that is lifted up. Often there is no “mechanism” given for the healing, as in our passage this morning. Those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. Power came out of Jesus and the people were healed.

Cured and healed. There are actually two different Greek words for Jesus’ actions: *therapeo*, which is translated as “cured” and *iaomai* which is translated as “healed.” *Therapeo* is the root of our word for therapy. To be “cured” means that the diseases that afflict us are completely eliminated and we are restored to a pre-disease condition. I think back to the days of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ever present discussions on when we were going to “return to normal” or when we are going to get back to our “pre-covid state.” We still have those conversations – when will worship numbers or children’s participation return to what we saw before the pandemic? And yet, I wonder if that question is really the most relevant one.

What if our questions focused on “healing?” The word translated as “heal” in this passage, and others in scripture has a deep and rich meaning. It means to renew and restore. For you grammar nerds, this verb can be transitive or intransitive, such that one can be healed or find healing, with no object associated with the verb. The connotations for healing are that one becomes sound or healthy again, but not necessarily to the exact same state as before the injury. Healing connotes that one becomes healthy again, whole in body, mind and spirit.

What might it mean to embrace “healing” rather than “being cured”? It would mean that we embrace the multi-faceted functions of healing revealed in scripture. New Testament Professor John Carroll shares that there are seven purposes of healing. Healing diminishes the power of evil; reveals the reign of God; leads to personal transformation; clarifies what was appropriate on the Sabbath; restores individuals to community; allows for faith and trust in God to be revealed; and redefines the role of sin and evil in sickness.⁴ *Who is Jesus?* One who heals so all of God’s purposes may be made manifest.

Jesus’ healings functioned to both restore an individual and restore community. In scripture healings often led people and communities to be even healthier than they were previously. Carroll argues that “Jesus steps beyond the conventionally drawn social boundaries, offering healing to persons who, both because of their social status (women, Samaritans, Gentiles) and their sickness (demonic possession, skin diseases), are estranged from human community.”⁵

We seem to have a lot of estrangement from human community going on in our world today – way too much estrangement. We are living in wilderness times – parched by divisions that are pulling apart our communities. What does it look like for healing to occur in this wilderness? The passage Barbara read from Jeremiah gives us some beautiful metaphors for

⁴ John T. Carroll. Sickness and healing in the New Testament gospels. *Interpretation* 49.2; 1995 p5.

⁵ *ibid*

what this healing looks like in a context that is not unlike our world today. The Hebrew Kingdom of Judah was experiencing spiritual decline and rebellion against God. The prophet Jeremiah reminds the people that if they put their trust in humans – no matter how powerful that human appears to be – they shall be like a shrub in the desert, living in the parched places of the wilderness. However, those who trust in the Lord, will be restored. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. Jeremiah talks about the resilient healing that shall happen: Those who trust in the Lord shall not fear when heat comes, for like a tree by the water its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it will not cease to bear fruit.

This is the healing Jesus brings. Jesus restores and renews us so we can continue to bear fruit, even when the heat comes. Even when we are anxious and afraid. Even when we are surrounded by chaos. Even when the powers and principalities threaten the ground we stand on. We can be healed and we can be healers.

Healing is a participatory process and it can be bi-directional. As we seek to be healers in our world, we ourselves receive healing. Henri Nouwen embraces this understanding of healing in his book *Reaching Out*. He writes about healing as a form of hospitality. We become healers when we connect to the other, and for Nouwen that is in a shared story. He says, "... healing means first of all, the creation of an empty but friendly space where those who suffer can tell their story to someone who can listen with real attention." It is in the empty spaces where healing can happen."⁶

It is in the empty spaces where we can give of ourselves – give ourselves completely. Where we can remember what God has done for us and we can become a healing presence for others. Who is Jesus? One who heals and one who teaches us to heal.

We have a lot of work ahead of us, for our humanity is dependent on the humanity of others. Our lives are dependent on the lives of others. The healing of our church, the healing of the community, the healing of the world is dependent on our mutual love and care for each other. We are healed when the refugee is not just welcomed, but has a sense of belonging to the community. We are healed when the lonely and the grieving and those who are despairing over life choices have a shoulder to lean on and a smile to reassure them. We are healed when those facing a long road of surgeries and chemo and radiation have a companion for the journey. We are healed when we stand up to and refuse to allow the injustices and indignities associated with bias and discrimination on the basis race, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation and ability. We are healed when we follow the path of Jesus, releasing our power and relinquishing our privilege, so that others can be restored and renewed. For we don't know the troubles and sorrows others have seen. We don't know the pain that sits behind their mask of saying everything is fine. What we do know is that Jesus modeled for us what it means to be a healer. So we open our arms wide in embrace. May it be so. Amen.

⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen. *Reaching Out*. New York: Doubleday & Company; 1975 p67.