

Epworth Chapel on the Green
July 30, 2017
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

2 Chronicles 7:11-16
Psalm 103:1-13
James 5:13-16
Matthew 8:1-4

Our short reading from Matthew's Gospel this morning is a sample incident that is part of a larger pattern in the Gospels. In the Gospels, Jesus arrives on the scene and proclaims the Kingdom of God in three primary ways: through preaching, teaching, and healing.

These activities are all of a piece. They are intricately connected. This should not surprise us, for in proclaiming the Kingdom of God, Jesus is bringing salvation to a broken and hurting world. And the root of the Greek word "salvation" is the word *wholeness*. *To be saved, to experience salvation, is to be made whole.*

When you look at Jesus' activity in the Gospels, this is precisely what you find. Jesus' ministry is marked by *making people whole* again in body, mind, and spirit. As such, healing and wholeness should not be limited to the physical realm, as important as that is. Healing is far more comprehensive than our bodies and the physical part of us. Wholeness also involves the emotional, spiritual, and psychological parts of who we are as persons.

Perhaps this is why James links healing with the forgiveness of sins in our epistle lesson. For a big part of the lack of wholeness we experience as human beings is our alienation from our Creator and our refusal to live in harmony with His loving purpose for us.

And God's loving purpose for all of us is to save us, to make us whole. Jesus, as God in the flesh, demonstrates this again and again in his short ministry. With this in mind, allow me three brief observations:

1. *God desires our wholeness.* God desires to re-create us in His image, to restore and renew all that sin damages and disfigures in us.

2. *Sometimes God works to make us whole through a miraculous healing touch* (usually in response to faith). We have examples of this in Scripture, but we also have an example from Epworth's past.

Many of you remember Jim and Joanie Reynolds, who worshiped with us a few years ago when Jim was the Mayor of Eagle. While they were with us, Jim was diagnosed with cancer. He asked to be anointed and prayed for, and so one Sunday we gathered around him here and did just that, asking God to intervene for Jim.

Several weeks later during the Afterword, Jim shared with us how he had been to the doctor, and the doctors were astounded and could not explain it, but his cancer was gone. Completely gone. It was, I believe, a genuine miracle of grace.

3. *Sometimes God works to make us whole by withholding His miraculous healing touch.* The pages of Scripture and our own experience clearly show us that God does not heal *everyone* of *everything* in this earthly life. This is a mystery that is hard to penetrate, but Scripture does give us a few clues.

Remember the apostle Paul, who prayed for healing and it did not come? Paul tells the Corinthians that in this case it was to keep him from becoming proud, and to teach him that God's grace could be sufficient for him as he suffered.

Peter tells the new believers to whom he writes that part of the reason they are experiencing suffering is because suffering *refines* and *purifies* their faith, proving it to be genuine.

The author of Hebrews tells believers who are struggling to view hardship (which sometimes comes as physical or emotional pain) as the *discipline* that comes from a Father who loves His children.

Ultimately, our healing and wholeness is in God's hands, and in God's time. Today we come as His children, asking Him by faith to work in our lives to make us whole. Let us come with strong faith, trusting in His power. And let us also be on guard against presumption, or any notion that we know better than God what is best for us.

Let us come with the confident assurance that He knows our needs, and we can trust Him fully to meet those needs in harmony with His divine wisdom and love.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.