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August 17, 2025

Scripture: Mark 2: 13-17

Sermon Title: The Great Physician

Text:

Mark 2:13-17

Jesus Calls Levi

13 Jesus[a] went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. 14 As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

15 And as he sat at dinner[b] in Levi’s[c] house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting[d] with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 When the scribes of[e] the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat[f] with tax collectors

and sinners?” 17 When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

This is the Word of God (Thanks be to God)

Prayer...

Introduction:

We are nearing the end of our summer sermon series on Healing Stories of the Holy Spirit. My hope is that this topic has opened you more fully to trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit for today. I want us to be open to miracles and other signs and wonders, since Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever and Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would come and we as followers of Christ would do even great things than Jesus did on earth.

I have enjoyed hearing from different members of our community talk about personal healing stories this summer. Many of you have experienced some type of miraculous healing either for yourself or

someone you know. As positive as we are about the beauty of miracles, a few of you have also reminded me to keep being balanced about this topic. The charismatic movement within the church has both blessed many people and also created a lot of pain. Some of us here have been wounded by churches over the topic of healing and miracles.

Today, I want to provide a bit more balance to this topic by reminding us of all the ways that the Holy Spirit provides healing in our world.

Do you notice in our story today that Jesus uses the metaphor of a doctor or physician to describe his own calling? Jesus is having a meal with tax collectors and other sinners. The tax collectors are viewed as sinners in Jewish society because these folks are collecting tax money that supports the corrupt Roman empire. Jesus does not judge Levi and the other tax collectors, instead he has a meal with them. He enjoys hanging out with the folks in his society that were viewed as more sinful. The pharisees who are identified as

more righteous in society want Jesus to not associate with sinners, but Jesus reminds the rather smug pharisees that just as a physician cares for the sick, so he is caring for those that know they are in need of grace and forgiveness for sin.

I think it is wonderful that Jesus thought of himself as a physician of sorts. Clearly Jesus must have respected the medical profession, since he identifies with it in a positive way. Maybe Jesus even considered whether he might want to practice medicine. When he put mud on the blind man's eyes, maybe he was trying out some natural medicine. Who knows? But clearly Jesus does see himself as a healer and a physician of sorts.

As we have mentioned, one of the names attributed to Jesus is the Great Physician. In this story by inviting all to eat with him he showed his openness to spread the healing power of grace through the Holy Spirit to all people.

I want to take a moment now and give thanks to God for the medical profession which helps through education and years of practice to bring greater healing to people. If you have served in the medical arena either as a nurse, physician, other technician, or administrative presence, please raise your hand. Thank you so much! (Clap)

I hope each of you realize that your work in the medical field is part of the ministry of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit moving in your life. It may be obvious but when we talk about healing, we need to remember that God often uses medical professionals to help heal people. My mom Di Murphy recently had shoulder surgery and I had the opportunity to accompany her with my dad to see the surgeon and to get her ready for surgery. We were impressed by Dr. Croy and his team and were pleased with the results of the surgery. It was a good opportunity to appreciate how dedication to the craft of

surgery and medical training is an important way God prepared Dr. Croy to help bring healing to my mom.

In my own life experience, I have benefited from Western medicine through a couple surgeries, the most significant being when I had open heart surgery when I was fourteen to widen my aorta so more blood could flow properly. In addition to appreciating western medicine, I have also loved more natural medicine methods of healing, such as chiropractic care, massage, and nutritional supplements. During the birth of our two girls, Cate and Chiara we were blessed to be supported by a Christian midwife named Lori Luyten, who had a birth center in Chino California. Ironically we met our midwife at an IKEA parking lot on the same day that I prayed for God to provide us a midwife. Lori, our future midwife was buying furniture at IKEA for her new birth center.

Besides natural medicine and traditional western medicine I have treasured what I have learned about how healing is normally quite

instinctual for our bodies. I had a chiropractor that used to say that the power to heal the body is within the body. Most healing occurs naturally as we practice good nutrition, proper exercise, and rest. Psychological healing often is a natural process through the gift of safe conversations within a caring environment.

Friends, the good news is that when we talk about healing through the Holy Spirit and the power of Christ the Great Physician, we can include healing through western medicine, natural medicine, our own self-care, nutrition, and exercise, and many other beautiful ways that help with healing. God's creation is full of natural herbs and other natural remedies that we can enjoy.

On the journey of healing, we can celebrate all the ways God helps heal us. Scientific studies prove that positive energy through prayer helps with healing, but we also know that healing often involves proper partnership with medical professionals.

My main idea today is that we should never see prayer or particularly healing prayer in competition with medicine. God works in many ways to bring about healing. It is best to not create competition between different styles or approaches to healing, but to instead make use of all of them as needed.

So when someone is suffering with cancer, it is okay to pray for healing and use chemotherapy if recommended. When someone suffers with migraines, it is good to pray but also to consider the benefit of a proper hydration, rest, maybe a hot bath and a massage. When you break a bone, you might need a cast to help stabilize the body so that natural healing occurs. We all understand what I am talking about, but sometimes our brains get confused and think we need to choose. Some people choose to not believe in miracles or prayer and rely solely on medical assistance. Other people pray but fail to get check ups from the doctor and pretend that a few arrow

prayers will do the trick. We need to use all that God has given us in the healing journey.

So then the obvious question is what if healing does not occur in the way we hope? Well, the basic answer is we get to decide how to approach that sad circumstance. Sometimes we might wish to keep using a combination of medical support and prayer. Sometimes we might need to accept limitations related to health conditions. For example, for me, after having heart surgery I hoped to never again use medication to control my blood pressure but turns out even with loads of prayer I still take medication. At some point I decided to give God thanks for the medication instead of asking God to take it away. You get the idea.

Many of us know Joni Erikson Tada who became a quadriplegic at the age of 17 in a diving accident. She is now in her 70's and has spent her entire adult life in active ministry. You may not know that Joni sought physical healing at some healing evangelist gatherings

soon after her accident. When significant healing did not occur, she chose instead to trust that God had a purpose for her life even if she was likely going to stay in a wheelchair. I once heard Joni speak in person and in her talk, she shared that she has raised money and given away thousands of wheelchairs around the world. When she visits different countries the children and adults who are gifted those wheelchairs are blessed by her generosity and faith. And they are deeply encouraged that Joni is living such a productive life even with her physical disability. Jonie has found that God created a purpose for her life even without the physical healing she longed for.

Here at our church, I want us to experience harmony in our healing ministry. Harmony or balance is a way of describing a type of healing ministry that both boldly asks for miracles and also trusts God when miracles occur through more traditional means or even when healing does not happen the way we hope. Of course, healing ultimately does happen in heaven, so Christ the Great Physician

ultimately will provide healing and restoration for all creation, but for now we live at times with what some theologians call the now but not yet reality. It is the reality that life sometimes does not meet our hopes and we must accept that suffering remains part of the journey of our lives. Grief is part of the reality of love as hard as that is for us.

I want to mention one other sensitive thing about healing ministry and healthcare in general. In the media there are often strong opinions shared about what type of healthcare everyone needs.

When watching television, you may notice that advertisements often exist recommending various kinds of medication or treatment.

They sound great until you also hear all the possible side effects.

Since side effects can sometimes occur depending upon our medical choices, we need to be sensitive to one another. We all need to have the freedom to make our own choices related to our health. Medical decisions often are difficult and require both expert advice and wise discernment on possible outcomes, so I hope we

as a society can learn to not assume medical decisions are always easy or the same for everyone.

One other commitment I want to make to you as your pastor.

Although I am committed to fostering a ministry at this church that honors the miracles and signs and wonders that were present in the early church and throughout church history , I also will seek to have our charismatic ministry include a more contemplative style. In other words, although we want to seek miracles, including possible healings, we don't want to approach this ministry in a way that seems weird or off putting for those that are sensitive to charismatic faith experiences. We will have a contemplative charismatic ministry here that is both restful and hopeful. We will grow from grace to faith to grace again. We will rest in the unconditional love of God when prayers feel answered and when they feel unanswered. We will trust in God and demonstrate God's love in a way that feels gentle and kind, since health is a sensitive journey for all of us.

Friends, Jesus is the Great Physician. The Holy Spirit heals today in many different ways. Let us open ourselves to all the benefits of prayer, western medicine, natural medicine, nutrition, exercise and our normal ways of partnering with the natural powers of healing within our bodies and all of creation. May we be open to being led by the Holy Spirit as we partner in the work of bringing healing to our world.

Let us pray...