

**Sermon Preached on July 3, 2022 by The Rev. Amanda Gerken-Nelson
St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Yarmouth, ME 04096**

Psalm 30

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Cure the Sick

Every month since I arrived in January, and as I understand it even longer before that, St. Bart's has had a healing service toward the beginning of the month.

Perhaps you've wondered why we do that, and I'll tell you that it has something to do with what we heard in Luke's gospel this morning.

As Jesus is instructing his disciples to go out into the world to carry on his ministry, he includes this very precise instruction: "cure the sick...and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" - Luke 10:9

Cure the sick – bring healing – remind people that the kingdom of God has come near, the love of God has come near, the wholeness of God has come near.

The gospels and the book of Acts go on to tell us that those first disciples – Peter, James, Paul – that many of them did in fact heal people as Jesus healed people: with a word, with a prayer, with a gesture: healed.

The power of love, the power of mercy, the power of grace that filled Jesus fills his followers so fully that they, too, can bring healing in his name.

I, like many of you, no doubt, have struggled with the miraculous stories of healing found in the Bible – having never seen a miraculous healing in my lifetime (that wasn't significantly assisted by Western or Eastern medicine). You could call me something of a skeptic of those stories.

But, I have found that I can access and accept these healing stories when I broaden my sense of what healing truly means.

Is healing a communal act – Jesus breaking down barriers and prejudices to relationships that prohibited connection and community and therefore part of the healing is changing how the community views and engages with each other therefore bringing healing? Yes!

Is healing a deeply personal act – Jesus looking at, touching, knowing, loving people AS THEY ARE and healing the self-hatred and stigmatism from the inside of the marginalized and hurt outward? Yes!

I don't read the Bible literally and so I don't read the miracle stories and think that Jesus had some sort of divine magic – an interpretation of these stories that some Christians DO believe, in a way, and therefore pray fervently for Jesus' intervention in the lives of their loved ones.

Which I worry about because I fear it can lead to an ableist reading of the Bible where sight is "better" than blindness, hearing is "better" than being deaf – which is all just not true.

So, I hesitate to read the Bible in that way.

But I do believe that Jesus had the immense power of our Creator of immense love, radical welcome, and, really the superpower that I love the most: the superpower of seeing all of God's creation – all of us and all of our foibles – and calling us "good."

So, when Jesus called his disciples then as he calls us now to "cure the sick" – some of us in health care professions might actually be able to do that with some ailments – but there are some ailments in life that don't need medicine, they need community, they need love, they need reconciliation.

There are some ailments that aren't detectable by swabs shoved up our noses, but are sensed, are codified in laws, and others infect our communities when laws are taken away.

It's not medicine that will fix those ailments, and there's not a magically clear cure that can just SNAP be found.

It is not medicine that we offer at our healing services, but it is a balm, a tonic, a weighted blanket in a way.

It's the gift of community, prayer, anointing, meditation.

The gifts of the kingdom

The gift of God's love, God's forgiveness, God's grace, God's calling in and holding us

We all come to this space with different ailments and carrying differently the weight of the ailments of society.

But we all share a need – for healing, in one way or another.

So, today we are doing things just a little differently.

In a moment, I'm going to stop speaking and you are invited to what is called "Open Space."

Open Space is a liturgical practice – meaning it happens during worship – that a colleague of mine, Nadia Bolz Weber, started at her church in Denver, CO called "House for all Sinners and Saints."

It's a combination of individuals choosing their own adventure, and a deep time of reflection in community.

Throughout the sanctuary there are four stations: the candles here at the front of the room, the baptismal font in the center of our space, an anointing table at the back near the chapel, and an icon reflection space at the back by the fireplace.

I have placed small prayers at each station – though, not at the icon station, the icon is the prayer at that station.

These stations are available to you during this time of reflection as means of connecting to yourself and to your God, to see how engaging with these elements of our worship and tradition offer something to you that facilitates healing, hope, reconciliation, or simply some peace.

As you light a candle, feel free to say the prayer that is often at baptisms: “let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your God in heaven” and remember how you are a beacon of God’s grace in the world (or simply light a candle for someone you’re thinking about who needs healing).

At the baptismal font, run your hand through the water or splash it on your other hand three times and remind yourself: “I was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. One God, mother of us all.”

At the chrism station – chrism being the name for our holy oil – dip your finger in the oil (remember a little goes a long way) and make the mark of the cross on the back of your hand or forehead (or the hand/forehead of someone else with their permission) and remind yourself: “I have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.”

At the icon station, there are chairs for you to sit and look, wonder, and take in. This morning it is the icon entitled “the Trinity” by Andrei Rublev from the 15th Century (a reproduction of course). Icons are “written” by the artist – each stroke a prayer. The end product is the embodiment of

connection to God. You're invited to ponder and see how the Trinity is inviting you to the table and bringing you healing.

As it states in the bulletin, you are welcome to attend each station, one, or none – you may choose to simply sit in contemplation and prayer remembering that “the kingdom of God has come near to you.”

The kingdom of God has come near to us my friends, let us settle into it and pray for healing.