

Who Do You Say I Am?: a Healer

Mark 6:6b-13

March 7, 2010 3rd Sunday of Lent

House calls. It's all about house calls.

Getting a doctor to make a house call is about as likely as getting a Republican to vote for a Democratic Health Bill or vice versa – they all may depend on a modern day miracle.

But doing House Calls was what Jesus ministry was all about.

Before we go too far into what Jesus did, we need to understand that healers in 1st century Palestine were not unusual.

From the Biblical Theology Bulletin we read that, in fact, “[i]n the Hellenistic-Roman world this type of popular healer was quite common. In the Israelite tradition, as we have seen, the most representative figure of this kind of popular healer was the healing prophet.

Other contemporary healers, like ... Hannina ben Dosa, shared with Jesus, among other traits, a close resemblance to the prophet

Elijah. (Green; Vermes: 6446; Meier: 581-88).

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0LAL/is_3_30/ai_94330270/pg_4/?tag=content;col1
Healing stories and medical anthropology: a reading of Mark 10:46-52
Biblical Theology Bulletin, Fall, 2000 by Santiago Guijarro

Without debating if Jesus healings were miracles or psychosomatic healings or

religious healings or metaphors;
it seems that Jesus was recognized as one of
greatest of the folk healers of his day and
clearly today he is **the** most famous.

But, while it's true that healers, were common,
Jesus particular style of healing was very
unique to him and it was some of these unique
qualities that were just as important, if not
more important, than the healings themselves.
You see, Jesus healing activity was a
manifestation of his vision and an
actualization of the Kingdom of God.

There are four things that made Jesus
unique in his healing activities.

First, they were inclusive.

Who Jesus healed was a demographic of who all
was invited to be part of God's realm.

To start with, we need to recognize that they all
were sinners and unclean, as far as the authorities
were concerned, their sickness itself was proof of
their sinfulness and we'll get back to this.

Beyond that, Jesus healed not just a select group, but everyone.

Just as he ate with everyone to show that God's realm was meant for all; he also healed everyone as a sign of God's love for all.

He healed rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, male and female, old and young, he healed pagans and Samaritans and prostitutes and he even healed for the enemy Romans.

He healed people that no one, no one, wanted to be near.

He healed people who were a danger to themselves and others.

The second unique element in Jesus healings is that they were ritualistically cleansing. Jesus usurped the role of the Temple priest and not only healed but then declared his patients clean and acceptable.

Let's take a look at one of these healings found in Mark 1:40-42.

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean."

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!"

Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

So what happens here?

"A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' Look carefully at what the poor man was asking for—he was didn't say to Jesus, "if you choose you can heal me." He said "if you choose, you can make me clean."

You see the practice in first century Palestine was for someone who had been suffering from a disease that forced them to become a cast out of society to go to the temple priest when the disease had subsided and go through a religious ritual to be “made clean,” or rather to be declared “clean” so that they could return to their home, their job, their life.

This man probably had heard about Jesus and what he had been doing and preaching and therefore recognized Jesus as a “holy man” or “prophet.”

So, perhaps what he was doing was actually asking Jesus to be his priest and declare him clean enough to return to society.

A sermon preached Almaden Valley United Church
of Christ San Jose, CA Date: February 15, 2009
Rev. Kevin M. Smith

But more profoundly, what Jesus was doing was destroying the whole notion of cleanliness and the whole idea that sickness was an act of God, a punishment for previous sins.

You'll also notice that Jesus doesn't ask the man what sins he committed that caused him this suffering.

He doesn't tell him to stop sinning.

Jesus just simply reaches out and offers his love.

His act of healing was proof positive that God loved this man.

Third, he made house calls.

Most healers were just like the doctors of today; they had a place that they operated from and people from all around came to them.

But Jesus went out to the surrounding villages and stayed with those he healed.

He then sent his disciples out to do just the same. They were instructed to heal and to stay with those they healed and eat whatever they were served. And if there was any pay it was that they got to eat.

Which brings us to the final element of Jesus unique healing ministry -- he didn't charge.

Other healers charged. It was how they made a living.

But Jesus and his disciples did it without charge. Now this is not a suggestion for how we might solve our healthcare crisis, but it was another way of saying that God's healing, God's love, God's Realm was meant for all people – not just those with money.

What is really interesting is that even after his death, the primary view of Jesus among the illiterate peasants he walked among was not at a god, not as a messiah, not as dead and resurrected divinity, but -- as a healer.

These peasants he ministered to were not interested in the theological questions that later plagued the church.

They simply saw him as a loving healer who clearly had God's blessing.

In the book that the Lenten Study Group is reading, John Dominic Crossan shows through scripture and early art that Jesus was early on primarily remembered for his program of eating and healing.

Using art, which was available to all people, not just the literate, Crossan shows that the primary image of Jesus among the poor was Jesus as Healer.

Which makes sense.

The poor didn't have the time or the energy to worry about theological debates. They were interested in food and health.

We see the same emphasis in Mark, the first gospel to be written and the gospel with the least theological spin.

Mark is the healing gospel.

Matthew portrays Jesus as the new lawgiver superseding Moses and it offers a new way revealed by Jesus as a replacement for Judaism.

Luke provides us with Jesus as a social prophet with a socio-political edgy spin.

John gives us a Jesus with a philosophical spiritualist spin portraying Jesus as a Jew with a platonic twist.

But for Mark, the earliest and simplest of the gospels – Jesus is a healer.

There is very little spin.

In the simplicity of the earliest gospel Jesus teaches and lives in a style similar to a Greek Cynic and he heals.

Every story in Mark, portrays Jesus either as a teacher in the style of a Cynic who casts doubt on any convention that puts religion or ideology above compassion or he is seen as healing.

But they really go together, because his healing, which is an enormous part of the Mark's gospel was just a manifestation of that teaching.

Chapter 1

Unclean spirit

Simon's mother-in-law – 1:32-34.

Leper

Chapter 2

Paralyzed man

Chapter 3

Withered hand

Chapter 5

Gerasenes demoniac

Leader of synagogue's daughter.

Hemorrhaging woman.

Chapter 6

Sends his disciples out to heal.

This continues all the way to the end of the gospel.

Even the final acts of his life are acts of healing as his death and resurrection are acts that heal us of the final calamity – death.

And the message is still the same -- not even death can separate us from the love of God.

And it doesn't end there, because each of us need to follow in Jesus footsteps.

We don't just reach out and cure people, but we do heal.

We can let people know that they are clean, and acceptable and loved.

We can let them know that God is not punishing them, but rather God is there with them as loving support and a healing presence.

And beyond that there is real curing being done by doctors and nurses and PAs and PTs and OTs and Ph.D.s doing research and all the other healing professions that are doing their work as a response to God's call to be healers.

God's love, through followers of Christ, is healing more than Jesus ever could have imagined.

Yes, the Body of Christ is still in the healing business.

So we are getting closer to answering Jesus question: "Who do you say I am?"

In the past weeks we have seen him in the image of the Cynic who questions religious and socio-economic conventions that put power over compassion.

We have seen him in the image of the apocalyptic preacher, who doesn't predict and end of the world but who proclaims the arrival of a new age of God's Empire.

We see him today as a healer, who is intent on showering God's love on everyone, especially on those who the established authorities deemed unclean.

**Ah, but there is much more to Jesus.
There is still the dangerous Jesus.
AMEN.**