

To Be Healed

Luke 5:17-26

March 9, 2025 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC

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This morning's scripture is my very favorite healing story in all of the gospels. Jesus is teaching in a house, and a big crowd gathers to hear him. Just then, some people arrive, carrying their friend on a stretcher. The man they are carrying is paralyzed, unable to help himself, or to get to Jesus on his own. So, his friends carry him. But when they arrive, they can't get in to Jesus because of the crowd. These friends are both determined and resourceful, so they carefully lift the paralyzed man up onto the roof of the house and they remove some roof tiles and gently lower the stretcher – and their friend – down through the roof and into the room, setting him right in front of Jesus.

Now, I want to just pause a moment here to say that we had to put a new roof on our house a couple of years ago. It was an insanely expensive project. I'm pretty proud of that roof, and I don't want anyone messing with it. There are SO many reasons that I would not take kindly to someone cutting a hole in my roof to get into my house. And I imagine that the owner of the house where Jesus was teaching felt the same way about his roof. Surely, the friends who removed those tiles knew that the homeowner would object. Surely, they knew that they were going to get a tongue lashing. For sure they knew that they would be paying for any broken tiles and spending hours and hours repairing the roof. But they broke into the house through the roof anyway, because they simply had to get their friend to Jesus to be healed.

I love what happens next. Jesus says that it is because of THEIR faith, the FRIENDS' faith, that the man's sins are forgiven and ultimately that he is healed. THEIR faith, not his. THEIR willingness to take a risk, to break some roof tiles. THEIR refusal to give up on their friend. Because of THEIR faith, Jesus heals the man.

We all need friends like that, don't we? Friends who won't give up on us, who have faith on our behalf, friends who take us to the doctor or the hospital when we cannot get there on our own, friends who plead our cause to God when we cannot do it for ourselves, friends who would tear up someone's roof to get us to help if nothing else would work. We all need friends like that, and we all need to BE friends like that, too. We need to be the friends who will pray for a sick friend and know that God will touch them with grace. This is why we are here today, to pray for healing for ourselves or others.

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In our modern world, we have become cynical about the healing stories in the Bible. Religious leaders who promise such miracles have earned a bad reputation. If your idea of a healing service comes from old movies where suffering people have found their way to medieval-style exorcists or to hucksters at summer brush-arbor revivals, then you will be surprised this morning. This service will be gentle and not at all dramatic.

There are some questions we should ask before we begin.

If we feel the need of healing, what may we pray for? The Bible says that we should pray for what we need. We should pray without ceasing. We should offer up to God our deepest joys and sorrows, and God will respond with a loving heart. So, pray for what you need. Pray for your heart's deepest desire.

And what kind of healing can we expect when we pray? To answer this question, we need to distinguish between miracles and healing. This church has been privileged from time to time to pray for those who were on the brink, hovering between life and death, and a miracle occurs – a premature infant who hangs on, who breathes, who survives; a neighbor with COVID who is not expected to live, but who pulls through. We are not promised miracles. We are not guaranteed a cure. But it is okay to pray for them. It is okay to lay yourself or your loved one before God. Pray for what you need, even if what you need is a miracle.

Healing, on the other hand, is something deeper, and it is available to all of us. It MIGHT mean a miracle. It MIGHT mean a cure. And it COULD mean a deep peace and a new perspective on a situation that cannot change. No matter our pain, no matter our grief, no matter our brokenness, God can love us into wholeness. THAT is healing, and we may pray for healing for ourselves or for someone else. Pray for what you need.

So, we will pray with and for one another this morning. In a moment, after we sing a hymn and say the Lord's Prayer together, I will move down to the floor. Then, if you wish for me to pray with you for yourself or for someone you love, please meet me here at the front. Nancy will play some music softly to keep our conversation private. After we pray together, I will offer to anoint you with hyssop-scented oil, if you wish.

If you choose not to come forward, that's fine. If you choose to remain seated, please use this time to pray quietly for those around you, or for yourself, or for our world. Perhaps you know what is on someone's heart. You can pray for them and hold them up to God's healing love. Perhaps you don't know the burden another is carrying. You can still hold them up to God's healing love. Perhaps you are thinking of something in your own life or in the world that needs healing. Pray for that, and God can bring healing there as well.

God knows where we are hurting. God knows where our hearts are broken. God knows the things in our lives that seem beyond repair. And God can love us into wholeness even there, precisely in those places that feel hopeless.

God offers us peace and wholeness and love and a healing too deep for words. Let us pray for that.

Amen