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Fearless Q: Does God Still Heal Today?

Mark 11:12-26

I've noticed that some weeks when I prepare to preach funny stuff happens that God wants to use to speak to me.

The strangest example of this happened when I was a pastor in Riverside County California in a desert community. The church was located in the middle of dry fields that were being developed into a housing subdivision. Huge Caterpillar DC10s were moving dirt around, and we noticed a higher than usual number of wildlife wandering onto the church campus. We'd see coyotes and bobcats in the parking lot along with an occasional roadrunner. The maintenance guys told us to keep our eyes open, because they'd had to dispense with a few rattle snakes here and there.

One particular Sunday morning I was preaching from Luke 10. Jesus was talking to his disciples who were returning from a short-term mission. He said:

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you."

Before preaching, I walked into the Men's Restroom and—I kid you not—there was a 4-inch scorpion right in the middle of the bathroom floor! I had to bend over and look at it more closely, because I couldn't believe what I was seeing in light of my sermon text. And so I did what any God-fearing preacher would do... I lifted my foot and squashed the scorpion on the ground! I've never seen a scorpion in the wild before or since. God really got my attention on that one!

So this week, as I prepared my message on the topic *Does God Still Heal Today*, on Monday I pulled a muscle in my back lifting a heavy box the wrong way. Initially my thoughts were "thank God for ibuprofen and heating pads" but as the week progressed I thought about how "fearfully and wonderfully made" we are as human beings... how the body heals itself naturally over time if we take care of it. And I began to have a grateful spirit for the fact that most of my life I've enjoyed wonderful health. And when I'm not up to par, or I have a physical ailment, most often I can go to a doctor who can help me get better.

Psalm 103 came to mind: "Praise the Lord, O my soul and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases." And I began to

think about some of the vaccines and medical breakthroughs that have been discovered just over this last generation that have saved millions of lives.

So as we launch into a discussion on the topic *Does God Still Heal Today*, we must acknowledge and thank God that He so often heals the body naturally over time, that He heals the body through our friends the doctors and the medicines they prescribe, and through surgical procedures that can do phenomenal things. We must also thank God that we are also blessed with counselors and psychologists and ministries like Celebrate Recovery that help heal our emotional brokenness.

Yet despite all the advances in physical, emotional and spiritual healing, we still have our quiet doubts. Why don't we see God do more miracles in church? Why does God heal some, and not others? And honestly, we just have to say "we don't know" to some of these questions.

But we must remain faithful to the Scriptures and have faith in God's power to heal. So I want to give you a "heads up" that at the end of the service a few of our elders and prayer team members will come forward to anoint people with oil and to pray for healing for any of you that would like that. You may want prayer for a physical ailment, or you may want prayer for an emotional or spiritual issue that's been bothering you. I'm telling you now so that some of you can work up the courage to come forward later for prayer. No need to be embarrassed or shy. We all need God's grace and healing touch.

We as a pastoral staff unequivocally affirm that God still heals today through many different channels. Specifically, to our conversation this morning—healing through prayer is part of the normal Christian life. Healing is a normal aspect of what it means to live under the reign of God.

It is true that we live in a fallen world where illness, suffering, and pain are part of the fabric of our existence. Yet we believe that where Jesus is lifted up as King God presence and power are here through the Holy Spirit to heal, redeem and save.

Our New Testament reading comes from Mark 11:12-26.

"The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard him says this.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written:

'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'?
But you have made it a 'den of robbers.'

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city.

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi" look! The fig tree you cursed has withered."

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

At the beginning of Mark 11 Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowds cry out "Hosanna, Hosanna... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Mark observes that Jesus went to the temple, looked around, and then headed out of Jerusalem back to Bethany with the disciples because it was late.

The next day Mark makes note of two prophetic actions that Jesus performs. The first is the cursing of the fig tree and the second is the cleansing of the temple. The fig tree serves as a metaphor in the Old Testament for Israel and its standing before God. Here the cursing of the fig tree signifies God's judgment on Israel for its lack of fruitfulness—having turned away from God into empty ritual and legalism.

Jesus also acts prophetically when he cleanses the temple. In Jesus' day tables were set up in the temple courts to enable pilgrims to change their respective currencies into coins for the annual temple tax, as well as to purchase pigeons, lambs, oil, salt for various sin and thanksgiving offerings. The business activity turned the temple from a house of prayer into a den of robbers. Jesus was zealous for God's house to be honored as a place of worship.

As evening came Mark again tells us that they left the city. The next day they head out from Bethany and Peter notices the fig tree that Jesus had cursed. Jesus uses this opportunity to teach on prayer. He says,

“Have faith in God... I tell you the truth if anyone says to this mountain ‘Go throw yourself into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Pastor Larry mentioned last week how it’s important to discern in Scripture whether something is meant to be taken literally or figuratively. In this instance Jesus uses a common OT metaphor—the idea of a mountain throwing itself into the sea—to mean that God could do what was seemingly impossible.

Jesus is teaching the disciples that when they pray, believe that God has the power to make the impossible happen.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus stressed the importance of having faith when we ask God for things in prayer, especially for healing.

- In Matthew 8 Jesus commends the Roman centurion for his faith. He comes to Jesus and asks Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus is willing to go to his home, but the centurion says “No Lord.” I am not worthy of you coming into my home, but say the word and my servant will be healed. And Jesus says, “I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.... Go and it will be done just as you believed it would.”
- Jesus says to the Syrophenician woman who touches his robe: “...daughter your faith has healed you.”
- Jesus asks the two blind men who cry out to him for healing: “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They cry out “Yes Lord” and Jesus touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith will it be done for you. And their sight was restored.”

Again and again Jesus acknowledges the crucial role of faith as part of the healing process.

On the other hand, we must also acknowledge that God doesn’t heal on every occasion! The best example of this in the New Testament is the Apostle Paul, the greatest missionary who ever lived, a man full of faith in God, who asked the Lord three times to heal him and God’s response was “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

This account in 2 Corinthians 12 is an important lesson for us when we ask for prayer for healing and we don’t receive the results we are looking for. Paul turned his unanswered prayer into a learning opportunity. He says:

God if your grace is sufficient then “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why for Christ’s sake, I

delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

And that teaching reminds us that our limitations, our weaknesses, our deficiencies are opportunities to experience more of God’s grace and power in our lives. As broken vessels we all need more of God’s grace and strength.

Going back to our passage in Mark, Jesus not only stresses the role of faith in healing but he also addresses the role of forgiveness. Jesus said, “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Just as faith is part of the healing process so is forgiveness. Unforgiveness blocks God’s healing power. It is a serious impediment to our relationship with God and to healing. In fact, Jesus indicates that our own forgiveness is linked to the forgiveness of others.

In Matthew 6 after Jesus’ teaching on the Lord’s Prayer He comments, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” 6:14 Forgiveness is critical to our emotional and physical health. Medical science is just now catching on to what Jesus taught 2,000 years ago. Listen to this short video clip: [Youtube.com/watch?v=FHB6q3xInc4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHB6q3xInc4) (1 min. 45 sec.)

So when we consider healing, Jesus says we must have faith that God has the power to heal and that we must forgive others who have hurt us so that God can forgive us and heal our bodies.

As we invite the elders and prayer team members to come forward we want to encourage any of you who would like prayer for healing to come up. You may need healing for a physical ailment, or you may want prayer for God to heal your heart, your emotions. Whatever your need, know that God loves you and so do our elders and prayer team members.

So as people come forward for prayer I want to say the benediction so those of you who do not want feel the need for prayer today can go.

Benediction: “The Lord bless you and keep you...”