

“Human Healing Takes Precedence”  
Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

March 18, 2018  
Isaiah 53:1-9; 1 Peter 2:21-25;  
Luke 14:1-6

Today we are going to talk more about Jesus as healer. Oftentimes when I think of Jesus as healer, there’s a kind of warm glow around that idea that Jesus can heal our infirmities. We have the story where Jesus encounters this fellow. It’s one of those interesting ones because he doesn’t really ask him if he wants to be healed. There is very little conversation and we don’t know what the relationship was between them. He just says the man needs to be healed, heals him, and sends him on his way.

I so wish that Jesus were here and could do this for people in my life, and that would be what this story is all about. Yet, as it goes on it seems that’s not what he wants to explain—how he can heal and how there’s this wonder in his presence. He begins to talk to the people who are with him and gives a little different twist to what he has just done. He ask them not “How did I do this,” but “Can I do this? Is it OK to do this?”

He’s already had several encounters in some other passages where they talk about Jesus doing things on the Sabbath and the Pharisees have gotten down on him for doing things and healing people on the Sabbath. So again, he’s doing it and asking, “Can we do this?” In a way, he’s asking, “Can I heal somebody or are there rules I have to follow instead?” Is there a way things have to be done that get in the way of healing people? He seems to by example say, “Well, maybe not.”

I think he is asking the question can we make a priority of human healing? Can we make a priority of human healing? The healing the refugee might need, or the person who experiences discrimination, or the healing of the addict. Or perhaps it’s just the healing of the sinner that all of a sudden brings it home to me.

It’s interesting to me that we do tend to have these moments where we recognize a need. Oftentimes it feels like it’s around the need of an individual or a particular event—even a gorilla. There’s a story of a gorilla being killed in a Cincinnati zoo and there was outrage about it. It makes some sense. We care about things that don’t seem right. And yet it seems that it’s the particular that we have an easier time with. There’s some research out that suggests it much easier for us to get upset about a particular than it is about something broad, like a crisis. Like the opioid crisis—115 people a day are dying because of overdoses. That feels incredible to me, and yet almost passé. It seems very weird to me. What’s in the way?

It feels to me like when Jesus is encountering the Pharisees, he is suggesting something of what is in the way. This story doesn’t perhaps lay it out for us, but it feels like he does in other places. In Luke 23, he is talking about the struggle of the Pharisee. “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and they lay them on the shoulders of others.” “They have neglected the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and

trust or faith.” “Inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.” He begins to suggest what he is confronting when he’s talking with the scribes and Pharisees.

Sometimes we can suggest that maybe those are just those experts. But it feels like today we are all to be experts, and so it places me right along with those that he’s talking to. It feels like he’s asking in my life, is there a reason I shouldn’t cure someone? Why might we forget about a crisis?

Sometimes it feels like we want to say it’s because of the decisions they made. It’s their problem. They made a bad decision; we don’t have to deal with it because it’s their decision. Well, I’m here to say I’ve made some bad decisions and if God decided not to help people who made bad decisions, if we’re not all a little broken, sheep that have gone astray, would God help any sinner? What if God looked down and said, “Jesus, I’m going to send you to be with those righteous people so you can encourage them. But those sinners? Let them die because they made bad decisions.” It’s shocking to me to think about how God says no. God so loved the world that he sent his only son to save the sinner, not to condemn him.

It’s interesting that as he does that he’s willing to take on the whole weight of their problem. He’s willing to be crushed for their infirmities. Listen to that litany in Isaiah that we recognize as what he does. He’s willing to take it on, to absorb that very violence of those that he’s coming to save.

As he comes, as he describes what this is about, it’s very interesting that he doesn’t say, “I’ve come to overthrow or through violence create a way.” But he is willing to take the abuse and in doing so invite us to see an innocent victim of human fear sacrificed. It makes me wonder how often I might do the same thing—through my own fear blame someone else. You see, the way Jesus describes what he’s doing is as if an ox or a child has fallen into a well. He says, “You have no problem, no matter what the rules are, of taking care of it. If it’s one of your own, your own child or your own stuff, you are going to try to make sure the problem is taken care of.”

Whose own stuff, whose own people are we all? When we begin to realize it’s all God’s, all people are God’s people, we realize that God cares about any and every child that’s fallen into a well, into a pit, into a place in their life where they can’t make it out on their own.

If you’ve ever felt the blame for something that was not really your fault, that idea of blaming the victim, Jesus shows us that we can blame innocent victim, for he is an innocent victim of his own society. He receives the violence they heap upon him because he challenges their way of going about doing things, about making rules and assuming that God is all about the rules more than God is about the love and grace God would give to humanity and that God wants to save humanity rather than make it all about one people.

*My people.* That's what I want. I want God to make it all about *my people*. And yet he continues to challenge me to see how I am broken. What he comes to do it to invite us to see that it's about righteousness. The interesting thing is that in this circumstance you can define righteousness as we see what he's doing. As he heals the person in front of him, he's almost giving us another way of thinking or another definition for that word righteousness. It's about healing, caring, and embracing the other. That's what he does, and he invites us there as well. He's inviting us to ask what the well is that somebody is in. What is the fence, what is the barrier around someone that we can help change? Can we help pull someone out? Can we help break a barrier down? Can we be like Christ, bringing healing? Can we cure, in spite of societal norms or in spite of our own perspectives? Can we move beyond and see the priority of healing human beings?

He wants to lead us on a path to healing—a path to heaven—that we can begin now. And when we do, we begin to recognize that we can, as Peter says, live into righteousness, live into healing and caring, and embracing others. Then we are dealing with the weightier matters of the law—with justice and mercy and trust. Amen.