

## THE HEALING WE CAN ALL DO

“. . . the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases.”

What an amazing sight that must have been. Anyone who was out for a stroll and wandered by that chaotic scene must have thought, “Wow! Look at all those people. What in the world is going on over at Simon and Andrew’s place?”

I wonder, as word got around the village that Jesus was there healing the sick, and people continued to show up and the crowd at the door of the house grew larger and larger, was there pushing and shoving? Were there arguments? “Hey, wait a minute! What do you think you’re doing? It’s my turn! Don’t you dare try to get ahead of me in line! I’m next.”

Was there screaming and pleading and begging? Was there concern

and fear among that mob of people that Jesus might run out of healing miracles before they had a chance to get to him? Or that Jesus would suddenly grow tired and say, “Okay, I’m done. Everyone go home now,” before everyone was healed?

“Don’t leave yet, Jesus! I need you to heal me, too! I’m worse off than she is! Over here! Please, Lord!”

To say that the healing power of Jesus was in demand is an understatement. When an entire town shows up at the door, looking for relief from whatever was ailing them, it was clear that he had hit the big time. As far as healers and do-gooders went, Jesus was in the Major Leagues now. He had patients coming out of the woodworks! And keep in mind, we’re only in the first chapter of Mark’s Gospel. There are still fifteen chapters to go!

You know, I’ve heard it said that a football team striving to make it to the Super Bowl can sometimes peak too soon. The team can hit the pinnacle of performance too early, and as the season is drawing to a close it suddenly finds that it has nothing left in the tank, and there’s nowhere to go but down.

Could it be that Jesus was peaking too early? Was he giving away too

much too soon? Should Jesus have tried to save a little something, a few healing miracles, at least, for the second half of the season, and not be so willing to heal everyone in town?

Of course, for Jesus, the end of his season wasn't a going to result in a trip to the Super Bowl and a Vince Lombardi trophy, but a trip to Calvary and a cross. Jesus knew this. He knew his time on this earth was limited. The end of the season for him was even now coming to an end. Jerusalem and death loomed ahead. Maybe that's why Mark portrayed Jesus as always being in a hurry, always on the go, always moving on to other places to do his ministry elsewhere. Because Jesus realized the clock was running down, and he didn't have any time outs left.

Which would explain why, when Simon and his companions finally found Jesus after a long search, in a solitary place, deep in prayer, and they asked him, "Where've you been? Everyone is looking for you," Jesus responded, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

But the people, they just couldn't get enough of Jesus. Jesus' healing touch was always needed, always in demand. The world was teeming with sickness and suffering. So much disease. So much brokenness. Jesus would just finish healing someone over here, and someone else would be in need of healing over there. You almost feel like saying to him, "It's pointless, Jesus. Why even bother?"

To which Jesus would probably respond to us, "I bother because I care." And I think Jesus would follow that up by saying to us, "And if you want to follow me, you need to care, too."

"Who, me?"

"Yes, you. You're my disciples, aren't you? You're my Body here on earth, right? Me, I've moved on to other places, other villages. I'm sitting at the right hand of the Father; but you, my church, are still here in the world for the time being. And I need you to go out into it and help in my work of healing people."

"But there's too much brokenness and pain, Jesus; too much sickness and sorrow and suffering, and too little of us. We can't heal the whole world."

"Well then, heal part of it."

"What do you mean, Lord?"

"I mean, if you can't heal everyone, at least heal someone!"

That conversation with Jesus happened in my mind, of course, and I wrote it down for this sermon. But I believe Jesus spoke to me through the Holy Spirit to tell us, the Body of Christ, to do just that. If we can't heal everyone, at least

heal someone! In the words of author and Unitarian minister Everett Hale:

“I am only one, but I am one.

I cannot do everything, but I can do something.

What I can do, I should do, and,  
with the help of God, I will do!

So, what does it actually mean, to go out into the world and help Jesus in his ministry of healing? I think this story from a book entitled *In His Image*, by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey can help answer that question for us.

John Karmegan came to me in Vellore, India, as a leprosy patient in an advanced state of that disease. We could do little for him surgically since both his hands and feet had already been damaged irreparably. We could, however, offer him a place to stay and employment in the New Life Center.

Because of his one-sided facial paralysis, John could not smile normally. When he tried, the uneven distortion of his features would draw attention to his paralysis. People often responded with a gasp or a gesture of fear, so John learned not to smile. Margaret, my wife, had stitched his eyelids partially closed to protect his sight. John grew more and more paranoid about what others thought of him.

He caused a lot of problems socially, perhaps in reaction to his disfigured appearance. He expressed his anger at the world by being a troublemaker. I remember many tense scenes in which we had to confront John with evidence of stealing or dishonesty. He treated fellow patients cruelly and resisted all authority, going so far as to organize hunger strikes against us. By almost anyone’s reckoning, he was beyond rehabilitation.

Perhaps John’s irredeemability attracted my mother to him, for she often latched onto the less desirable specimens of humanity and tried to save them. She took to John right away, spent time with him, and eventually led him into the Christian faith. He was baptized in a cement tank on the grounds of the leprosarium. But John’s conversion did not temper his great resentment against the world. He made some friends among fellow patients, but a lifetime of rejection and mistreatment had permanently embittered him against all non-patients.

One day, almost defiantly, he told me he wanted to visit the local Tamil church in Vellore. I went to the leaders of the church, described John, and assured them that despite the deformities caused by his leprosy he had entered a safe phase of the disease and would not endanger the congregation. They agreed that he could visit. “Can he take Communion?” I asked. I did not know how they would respond because their church used a common cup. They looked at each other, talked it over for a few moments, and said that he could

also take Communion.

Shortly thereafter I took John to the church, which met in a plain, white-washed brick building with a corrugated iron roof. It was a tense moment for him. Those of us on the outside can hardly imagine the trauma and paranoia inside a leprosy patient who attempts for the first time to enter that kind of setting. I stood with him at the back of the church. His paralyzed face showed no reaction, but a trembling gave away his inner turmoil. I prayed silently that no church member would show the slightest hint of rejection.

As we entered the sanctuary during the singing of the first hymn, an Indian man sitting in one of the chairs in the back half-turned and saw us. We must have made an odd couple: a white person standing next to a leprosy patient with patches of his skin in garish disarray. I held my breath. And then it happened. The man put down his hymnal, smiled broadly, and patted the chair next to him, inviting John to join him. John could not have been more startled. Haltingly, he made shuffling half-steps to the row and took his seat. I breathed a prayer of thanks.

That one incident proved to be the turning point of John's life.

Years later, I visited Vellore and made a side-trip to a factory that had been set up to employ disabled people. The manager wanted to show me a machine that produced tiny screws for typewriter parts. As we walked through the noisy plant, he shouted that he would introduce me to his prize employee, a man who had just won the parent corporation's all-India prize for the highest quality work with the fewest rejects.

As we arrived at his work station, the employee turned to greet us, and I saw the unmistakable crooked face of John Karmegan. He wiped the grease off his stumpy hand and grinned with the ugliest, loveliest, most radiant smile I had ever seen. Then he held out for my inspection a palm full of the small precision screws that had won him the prize.

A simple gesture of acceptance might not seem like much, but for John Karmegan it proved pivotal and completely healing. After nearly a lifetime of being judged on his marred physical image, he had been welcomed on the basis of another image. I had seen with my own eyes a replay of Christ's acceptance and healing of the lepers he encountered. Christ's spirit had prompted the Body of Christ on earth to adopt a new member, and finally John knew he belonged.

I believe that's the kind of healing we're called to do, my friends. Not so much to make someone well, but to make someone feel welcome. Not so much having people standing at our door wanting us to touch them and take away their sickness, but people standing in the checkout line at the grocery store, or standing at the door of our church, wanting to be touched by kindness,

acceptance helpfulness, friendliness and compassion. Not so much going over to someone's sick bed and reaching out to take them by the hand and help them out of it, but going over to someone's sick bed and holding their hand while they lay in it.

I believe that's the kind of healing Jesus calls us to do as his followers, and as the Body of Christ here on earth. And it's the kind of healing we can all do. Every one of us. The only thing we need is a loving, caring, compassionate heart that's willing to receive others who are sick, suffering, sad and lonely as children of God and brothers and sister in Christ. And Christ's Spirit will help us with the rest.

That's why we can say with confidence and willfulness:

"I am only one, but I am one.

I cannot do everything, but I can do something.

What I can do, I should do, and,  
with the help of God, I will do!

Amen.