



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

### ***The Miracle Mystery of Healing The Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany 272021***

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

On Friday night, I asked the vestry while we were at retreat to name something that they learned from 2020. and we went around the room and people shared incredibly beautiful things. And when it came to my turn, which was the last person to speak, I said that I learned in 2020, how to heal. And by that, I mean not that I have never had an opportunity to heal before 2020. I mean that in 2020, the process of healing, the healing process became mysterious to me. And it became mysterious to me because I encountered a healing process that went unlike any other that I had experienced before. In the past, when I have suffered an injury or when I have experienced a broken leg or needed an operation, there was a fairly rapid process of healing.

And one year ago next week, I experienced instead a traumatic injury to my shoulder, a separated shoulder, which has taken a year to heal. It happened on the ski slope when I was with the youth group, it was one of those falls that was like any other. I should not have been hurt, but for reasons that are complicated, I came down wrong and my shoulder separated. And it was a significant enough injury that the only thing that could be done was to slowly let it heal. It was not so bad as to require surgery, which would have been incredibly painful, and it was not so good or light so that I could somehow slowly recover. Instead the past year. I have experienced discomfort and pain on a daily basis in my right shoulder.

And that healing process has been slow. The therapy that I had to go to, the work that I'm starting to do as I slowly return to my normal exercise habits, all of this has required me to break down a lot of scar tissue. And to slowly allow the joint to become unfrozen until I can finally get back the mobility I needed. And little bit by little bit, I've also gotten a bit of strength, a full year of therapy and a full year of living with discomfort. It has been a learning process for me. I now look at anybody else who is dealing with a long-term disability, who is trying somehow to continue to make their way. And I see in those moments where someone gathers up the strength to keep on going a little bit of a miracle.

And in 2020, I also had a kind of parallel healing process as my father slowly declined and finally died a couple of weeks ago. Because in that time, in which he was struggling with dementia, I had to kind of go through a grieving process. It began a bit early for me to start to grieve the relationship that we had. Both

what happened and what didn't happen, the things that were done and the things that were left undone, The things that were loving and the things that were not loving and unloving.

And over the course of this past year, there's been a kind of healing that has taken place, again, with the help of some therapy, again, with the experience of some pain, again, with the work of breaking down some scar tissue, but on an emotional level, on a spiritual level, on a psychological level. And I say these three things because they are distinct, but they overlap and they are somehow involved with each other. Over the course of 2020, I have healed from our relationship. And as he was dying, I kissed his forehead and said to him, thank you. And his life became to me a grace, something to be celebrated.

So 2020 has been a time for me in which the healing process has become mysterious. In which the healing process has a kind of miraculous element to me. And it's not because I was suddenly killed in an instant, but rather because I began to see how involved and how complex and how truly mysterious that process of healing can be. And I say all this, because in today's gospel, we meet Jesus, the healer. And we see not only a moment in which He heals the close relative of one of His disciples, Simon Peter's mother-in-law, but we see all of the instances in the course of a day in which Jesus heals any who come to him as well as casting out demons.

And in the Gospel of Mark, the kingdom of God comes when demons are cast out and when people are healed and this is a mystery, it's a miracle. And time after time in the Christian faith, we have sometimes tried to commodify that mystery of healing. We have tried to somehow replicate it so that people can experience healing themselves in their own context. And there's a completely human reason why we do this. Because any of us who struggle with disease, any of us who struggle with injury, any of us who struggle with some kind of trauma, we want to be healed. It's a natural human inclination.

But today's gospel is a reminder to us that healing is a miracle. Healing is a mystery. It's not a skill we can transfer and practice whenever we want to. But it's a moment in which the kingdom of God breaks in. Hallelujah. And in today's gospel, there are three things I want you to see about the healing process. The first is contained in the exact interaction, the conversation, the healing communion that Jesus experiences with Simon Peter's mother-in-law. And that first thing I want you to see is the Greek word for raising up, the minute that Jesus pulls her up and raises her up onto her feet. It's the same exact word that is used for resurrection, *agallia* (sp?).

The same way word in Mark appears again in chapter 16, when the disciples go looking for Jesus who has been crucified and laid in the tomb, and the angel says to them, "He is not here. He has been raised." In the same moment when Jesus pulls Simon's mother-in-law to her feet, He raises her. And in this, we need

to see the first point I want to make about healing, which is that healing is a witness to resurrection. Everybody who experiences healing here and now will still face death and resurrection, but healing is a witness to resurrection.

It is a testimony to the life that is stronger than death, so that when we see someone going through a convalescence and being courageous, we see a witness to resurrection, not to someone struggling to return to the past, but someone leaning into the future, someone willing to go forward, someone being brave, someone being courageous, someone being loving, and someone daring greatly. So healing is a witness to resurrection to the way in which all things in heaven and on earth will be transformed by Christ much in the way He himself was raised from the dead. And healing is something that goes with the grain of God's creative power in this world, even though it seems to be something that is natural and part of everyday life. It's a reminder to us of the miracle of life, a reminder to us of the future that God is calling us to in Christ, and a reminder to us that resurrection begins today. For when we heal, we participate, not in some attempt to return to the past, we move into a new future.

The second thing I want you to see in today's gospel from Mark and the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law is that moment in which we read that as soon as she was healed, the fever left her and she began to serve them. Now those of you who are attuned to the different ways that women function in the narrative in Mark, it is right to say that there's something domestic about what she did, but I also want to suggest to you that in that word "serve," there is something much more powerful going on. Because the word "serve" in Greek is "*diakonia*." And the same word is used later in Mark in chapter 10, when Jesus says to His disciples that the son of man that is Himself, that He has come not to be served, but to serve. And this word stands behind every act of ministry we do whenever we serve on behalf of Christ.

And this brings us to the second point I want to make about healing, which is that healing is an invitation to communion, an invitation to move beyond not just the event of healing, but to enter into a new relationship in which we are fulfilled in our community. So healing has a purpose. It's not an end in itself. And when Peter's mother-in-law is healed, she is invited and enters into a time of service because each of us who experiences healing, the end result of it is not that we would stand on our own two feet, but that we would learn to serve one another, which is of course, another way of saying to love one another as Christ has loved us. Peter's mother-in-law is an example of the first disciple in the Gospel of Mark, much in the same way that the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John is a representative of the first disciple there in that gospel. For she was lifted up, she was raised. The fever left her and she began to serve.

The final thing I want you to see in today's gospel is that Jesus is the center of healing. We do not know how Jesus healed people. We don't have any kind of

manual for healing that is placed before us in the gospels. All of those things are viewed in the eyes of the evangelist as unnecessary to say. What needs to be said and what we need to be reminded of is that Jesus is the agent of healing. Jesus lies at the center of all healing. And Jesus lies behind and is found in every true act of healing. So whether we acknowledge it was Jesus or not, whether or not we see Christ in the presence of the healing or not, Jesus is at the core of all healing. Jesus is God's healing in our lives.

All of these things are important for us to keep in mind because you and I have been called to be healers. You and I have been called to bear witness to the mystery and the miracle of healing. And that element of witness is incredibly important for us to do. Later in the Gospel of Mark, in chapter six, Jesus goes to His hometown and when He gets there, He finds that the people begin to question His authority. They begin to undermine Him. They begin to attack Him. They begin to somehow try to rob Him of any kind of competency He might have, any kind of authority He might wield. And Jesus finds that in that place, He could do no deed of power, no miracle of healing there, except He laid His hands on a few sick people and cured them. Note that distinction in Mark, Jesus still cured people but they failed to see the miracle. They failed to see the mystery. And that is why Jesus, we read, was amazed at their unbelief.

You and I have been called to be witnesses to the mystery and miracle of healing. You and I have been called to walk with people as they try to make their way and recover from the traumas of this life, as they struggle against the diseases of this life, as they deal with the injuries of this life. Because in that interaction, we will see Jesus. In that interaction we'll experience communion. And in that interaction, we will begin to see resurrection and to be a witness to healing - to the mystery and miracle of healing means as well that we need to be aware that healing is not something that happens in a solitary event, but healing opens us to a connection we have with others, the kind of social fabric that we all have that help us become who we are.

Because in life, there are certain things that are inescapable. We will never escape death. We will never escape disease. We will never escape grieving. And Christ has come so that we can never escape resurrection and healing and hope, provided we are aware of the mysterious and miraculous nature of these. And to be aware of that social fabric, to have that kind of connection, to realize that we are, because others have been for us, to realize our relationality in Christ. These things are important for us to keep in mind today, as we make our way through our world and try to make sense of this complicated time.

I have two pictures I want to share with you that helps bring this point I'm making about being witnesses to the miracle and the mystery of healing to bear. The first is from an Italian photographer, Emanuele Guadagno. He did this in 2006 in Rome, and this is called "Indifference." It has an old man walking by a beggar

who's resting against the walls of a church. And this indifference is what the photographer sees is happening. The old man who he writes has perhaps sacrificed all his life for the bit of prosperity he has right now, who has worked hard, walks by the beggar who is standing before him and simply pays him no mind.

And this indifference is something that Pope Francis in his most recent book, *Let Us Dream*, this indifference is, Pope Francis says, "A kind of disease that we are suffering from that was magnified over the past year. And this disease of indifference," he writes, "Must be healed by the love of Christ so that these two lonely individuals see a connection between them, see a destiny that they are both tied to so that they can see the love that keeps them in being, and draws them together in Christ." So one of the things that we have to do as witnesses to the mystery and miracle of healing is to be willing to speak and to cast aside our own indifference.

The second picture I have for you is from Rembrandt van Rijn. This is a sketch that he did in the late 1650s. Rembrandt often began his paintings with these quick little sketches, but he never completed this painting. It's an incredibly powerful sketch, nonetheless, because in it you have Jesus healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law. And you see to the lower left of the sketch a kind of gesture to the map that she was lying on. And you see their hands clasping together and you see empathy between Jesus and Simon Peter's mother-in-law and you see this incredible connection and communion. And so you see in this moment, a kind of cure for indifference that happens at the moment of healing. For Jesus did not simply take away her fever, but Jesus brought her into relationship, and she saw her Lord and met the merciful gaze of her Savior. And she experienced the transformation that happens when empathy wins and love wins and God's healing becomes apparent.

Today, I want to finish this sermon by asking you a couple of questions and they are based on something that presiding Bishop Michael Curry gave in an interview that he did on January 10th, that speaks directly to this need for us to be witnesses to healing. When he was asked by Krista Tippett to say what he would say to us who are struggling now during this time of political instability, during this time in which we are trying to somehow find our way forward, during this time of pandemic, during this time in which we are constantly reminded of death and disease, during this time in which we're constantly reminded of the inequalities in our cities, in our country, of all the ways we have to repair the social fabric, Bishop Curry answered the following. He said, we need to ask three questions: what hurts, what helps, and how can I help?

As we begin to follow Jesus as He makes His way to preach the good news and to bring the kingdom of God near to us, as we find our way during this season of epiphany and follow the light that comes from Him and experience the freedom

that He promises that comes to those who follow Him. May God give us grace to ask these questions:

What hurts? What helps? How can I help?

Amen.

[End of Recording]