

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
“Being God’s People: Healing”
Rev. Dr. John Judson
February 4, 2018

1 Samuel 6:1-3
Mark 1:29-39

“So, when do we get to do the Jesus stuff?” he asked. “What do you mean?”, the usher asked. “I mean, when do we get to do all of that healing and miracle stuff that Jesus did?” “Oh,” replied the usher, “We don’t. All we have to do is to believe that it happened a long time ago.” This was the conversation that John Wimber had with an usher after his second Sunday in church. Wimber had grown up in a home that had no religious roots. As far back as anyone could remember, no one in his family had ever attended church. As a talented musician, and a founder of the Righteous Brothers, his life had not been lived, as he puts it, quite in the manner that Jesus would have liked. But a friend of his began telling him about Jesus, and so Wimber and his wife, desperate to turn their marriage around began reading scripture. He loved the Jesus he met there. Jesus the healer. Jesus the miracle worker. And so, on that second Sunday, he wanted to know when people were going to quit singing boring music and do the Jesus stuff.

So, when do we get to do the Jesus stuff? So, when do we get to do the healing that we read about this morning? The question may be one that makes us both nervous and hopeful. It makes us nervous because we have seen too many television faith healers, who were in it only for the money. I remember one of those “healers” who told people that if they sent him money, a faith pledge, he would heal them. In fact, he said, that he spent so much time laying on and praying over people’s letters that asked for healing, that he got blood poisoning. What was happening however was that he was having his staff open the letters, take out the money and then throw away the prayer requests. It makes us hopeful because we believe that God is still out there...or in here. We believe because we trust that our prayers are heard and that God has compassion on God’s children. We believe that God can, will, and do amazing things. And so we return to Wimber’s question, when do we get to do the Jesus stuff? When do we get to heal? The answer, simply put, is that we get to do it every Sunday.

We do it every Sunday when we pray together. We do it when we fill out the prayer slips and let the staff pray over them. We do it when we stop in the hallway and pray for those whose names are on the prayer boards. I realize that this might not seem like doing the Jesus stuff, yet it is, because prayer was at the heart of all that Jesus did. Though he often healed without prayer there were times when he prayed before healing and when he taught his followers that certain healing could only come through prayer. Let me be clear in this moment. Prayer is not a magical incantation that makes God heal. It does not force God to act in the ways we desire. We know this because most of us here have had someone we loved and cared about, whose only

healing came not in this world, but when they took their last breath. At the same time, over the course of my time as a pastor, so many people have said to me, “I would not be here without prayers”, or “I could feel the prayers at work when I was being treated.” Those words offer us hope that our healing work of prayer is truly Jesus work. Either way, we are called to do the Jesus stuff of prayer, trusting that God hears and answers in God’s way and God’s time.

We do the Jesus stuff every Sunday when we gather as community and share our lives together. I’m not sure if you notice but we live in a hurting and broken world, in which many of us come here with fears and failures, with regrets and recriminations, with loneliness and loss. The gift of this community is that what we do here brings healing. We are healed from our past by confession and forgiveness. We are healed of our loneliness by the friendships and welcome we experience. We are healed of our fears when we find hope and courage in the word of God proclaimed. We are comforted in our loss by those who surround us. We are healed and filled when we come to this table, the table of the communion of the saints, when we are fed and nourished by Christ who is its host. We are healed from feeling inadequate when we are welcomed here not because of what we do or what we have, but because we simply are. The worship we do here, the community we build here, the mission we do from here, is all healing work. It is all Jesus’ stuff.

So, what happened to John Wimber? He went on to plant a church called the Vineyard Church in which doing the Jesus’ stuff was not only something in the past, but happens in the present. That church went on to plant many other Vineyard churches where people find healing and wholeness. I think Wimber would like our church because in this place we too do the Jesus’ stuff. In this place we are a healing community. Through Christ we work to heal one another, our city, our nation and our world.

Here then is my challenge for you this morning. As you come to the table I challenge you to ask yourselves this question, “How am I being part of Jesus’ healing work in the this place and in the world? How am I doing Jesus stuff right now.”