

First Presbyterian Church  
Life Lessons from Luke: Healing  
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2 Kings 5:1-15; Luke 7:1-10

It looked like a great idea for continuing education. Many of you may not be aware that one of the things that ministers are encouraged to do is to engage in continuing education. Over the years I have taken a few short courses, watched videos, or simply done some reading. But this was the perfect continuing education opportunity. First it was online. Second, it was only eight, one-hour sessions. Third, the price was, well, reasonable. Fourth, even if I could not use what I learned in the church, I could probably use it as a sideline income generator. Oh, and what was this continuing education? It was a course on healing. That's right, in eight, one-hour sessions I could learn how to lay my hands on people, channel the power of God, and heal them of all diseases. Just imagine what a difference that could make. None of you would have to go to the doctor. None of you would need surgery. Just drop by and see Dr. John and everything would be well. Even so, I made the difficult decision to not take the course...though it might have been interesting.

Healing. Of all the stories and occurrences in scripture that cause people to pause, question, and doubt, the healing miracles and stories are probably close to the top of the list. As 21<sup>st</sup> century believers we have physicians, therapeutics, vaccines, diagnostic tests, robot surgical equipment, and a whole host of other scientifically oriented items that cause us to look askance at the healing stories. There are other Christian traditions in which healing still plays a significant role but for Presbyterians we usually follow John Calvin's lead when he states that the miraculous spiritual gifts such as healing and speaking in tongues were simply a part of the life of the early church and no longer function in the modern world...even if for Calvin the modern world was the 1500s. This always raises the question of what do we do with these stories? Do we argue over whether they were "real"? Do we argue about whether this kind of healing is still possible? Or are there other alternative ways of understanding them? What I want to do this morning is to offer a different way of seeing these stories, and that are signposts pointing to God's ultimate desire for humanity. Meaning that human beings, in God's final consummation of all things will be made whole. They will all be healed.

To understand this idea, I want to use a Texana illustration. Which is especially fitting since my family is here visiting...and they will all get it. In Texas there are a series of the world's largest car and truckstops called Buc-ee's. They are on major interstate highways and they are known for several things, including clean bathrooms and kitschy Texana merchandise. But the other thing they are known for are their road signs. Some of them read, "You can Hold it...Buc-ee's only 276 miles ahead." "No waiting for our java to load." "Let us plan your next potty." And the one that is most germane to this morning, "Here is your sign." These signs are always assurance that there is a place of rest and refreshment ahead. This is the way the healings in scripture work. They are reminders that God has something wonderful ahead. They are reminders that God's ultimate plan for humanity is that we be healed and made whole. This

means healed on both an individual and a communal basis. The individual basis is healing such that human beings become capable of loving God and neighbor...that as the prophet Jeremiah stated, the Law would be written on people's hearts, and they would just live it. Communally, healing can be seen in the Book of Revelation where there is a tree in the garden of the New Jerusalem whose leaves are intended for the healing of the nations. These are the healings toward which the signposts are directing us.

What this means then is that these healing story signposts are to engender hope. The distance between my parents' house in Houston and our house in San Antonio was almost exactly two-hundred miles. And as Cindy often said, it was probably the world's most boring drive. You sort of point your car toward home, drive in a straight line and set the cruise control. And though we often stopped at Buc-ee's along the way, there were other times when we were in a hurry and did not. Yet the Buc-ee's signs were signs of hope. They were signs of hope because they reminded us that we were two-thirds of the way through our journey and home was around the corner. This is the hope that these healing stories give us. They tell us that the condition in which we find ourselves is not the last word. That the condition in which we see the world is not the way it is always going to be. That there is hope that just as Naaman and the slave were healed so can be creation; so can be humanity; so can be our relationships; so can be our nation. There is in these signposts hope that God is at work continuing God's healing mission and that one day we will arrive.

Finally, there is one more important aspect of these stories which we ought not to miss and that is that this promised future healing is open to all. Buc-ee's makes sure that motorists know that they are open for business for all kinds of vehicles. Trucks, cars, RVs, motorcycles, and yes, Buc-ee's is even installing Tesla supercharging stations for electric vehicles. In other words, the refreshing and rest of Buc-ee's is open to all. This is what this promised future of healing and wholeness does as well. To make this clear all we need to do is to look at our two stories. The first is of Naaman, a Syrian general who was the enemy of Israel. He was suffering from leprosy, a horrific, slow, debilitating disease, for which there was no cure. Naaman is told that there is someone in Israel who can heal him. He sends gifts to the king of Israel who is afraid that Naaman will attack him because he, the king, has no ability to heal the general. Into this story then comes the prophet Elisha who tells Naaman to go and bathe seven times in the Jordan river. While at first hesitant, the general does so and is healed. The second story concerns a Roman slave. Not a Jewish person as a slave, but probably a captive from another nation. Even so, the healing power of God is made visible in his or her life. What this means is that God's end game of healing and wholeness is not limited to any subset of human beings but is offered to all.

This morning on the way to church I was listening to an interview with a musician who described the last several years as the world being turned inside out. I would argue that that is an appropriate way to describe what we have been and are still going through. And in those times of the world being turned inside out it is often hard to find a firm frame of reference for our lives. What I hope for all of us this morning is that we will allow these healing stories to help offer us a frame of reference in that they remind us that God desires a healed world. That God is at work slowly, but consistently bringing that world about through us and through others. My challenge to you then is this, to ask yourselves how am I allowing the healing stories of scripture give me hope in this moment?