

“Our Healing God”

Psalm 23; John 9:1-7

March 19, 2023

Today's Gospel reading from John 9: speaks to us about the healing nature of God. In this passage, we witness Jesus healing a man who was born blind, and it reminds us of the amazing power of God's love to heal and restore our brokenness. As we reflect on this passage, we are reminded that we all carry wounds and scars. These wounds can be physical, emotional, or spiritual. They can be caused by our own actions or the actions of others. But no matter how we got them, we can trust in God's healing power to bring us wholeness and restoration. Henri Nouwen, once wrote, "To be healed we must first come to the end of our own power and accept the gift of power from above." In other words, we must recognize that we cannot heal ourselves and that we need God's healing touch. We must be willing to surrender our brokenness to God and allow Him to work in us. In the story of the blind man, we see this surrender in action. The blind man does not demand healing from Jesus, nor does he offer any resistance when Jesus tells him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. He simply trusts in Jesus and obeys His command. And it is through this trust and obedience that he is healed.

Likewise, we must learn to trust in God's healing power and be willing to follow His lead. We may not always understand why we are going through certain struggles, but we can trust that God has a plan for us and that He is working all things together for our good which He tells us about in Romans 8:28 – “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.*” Christian thinker Dietrich Bonhoeffer once, wrote, "The healing of the sick is not a miracle but a sign of God's love." In other words, God's healing power is not a magic trick or a show of power, but a tangible expression of His love for us. And just as the blind man's healing was a sign of God's love, so too can our own healing be a testament to God's grace and mercy.

In my own life, I have witnessed the healing power of God in countless ways. I have seen physical healings that doctors could not explain. I have seen emotional wounds mended and relationships restored. And I have seen spiritual transformation that can only be attributed to the power of God.

One of the most powerful illustrations of God's healing power that I have encountered comes from the book "The Hiding Place" by Corrie ten Boom. In this book, Corrie tells the story of her experience in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. One day, she discovered that her sister, Betsie, was dying from malnutrition and abuse. But even in the midst of this horrific situation, Betsie refused to give up hope. She reminded Corrie that God was with them and that He had the power to heal her. One day, Betsie became too weak to move, and Corrie was sure that she was about to die. But then something miraculous happened. Betsie sat up and exclaimed, "Corrie, look! The fleas are gone!" Corrie was confused by this statement, but Betsie explained that they had been praying for God to remove the fleas from their barracks so that they could hold a Bible study without being interrupted by the guards. And somehow, the fleas had disappeared. This may seem like a small thing, but to Betsie and Corrie, it was a sign of God's power and love. It was a reminder that even in the darkest of circumstances, God was with them and that He had the power to heal and restore their brokenness.

In the passage from the gospel, one of the things that comes front and center is the role of sin in sickness. Jewish people believed, wrongly, at the time that if there was a physical illness, it always had to do directly with sin, either the sin of the person or that of their parents. We see this belief really shown in the Biblical book Job. I recently had the privilege of leading our Bible study through the book of Job and I remain deeply moved by it. In the book, when all this tragedy and misery befalls Job, three of his friends arrive to sit with him in his pain and mourning. First of all, way to go friends for they sit with him for days before they begin to speak. Just as a side note, sometimes we think that we need to say so much to people who are suffering. We feel as though it's incumbent upon us to help make sense of the pain. In truth, more often our words fall heavily upon the very person we are trying to help. Sometimes, all that's needed is just your presence. To be willing to sit with someone in the pain is oftentimes the greatest gift we can give the person. Job's friends nail it for the first couple of days...then they begin to speak. And when they do, what they want Job to do is to realize that it's his fault. That somehow, somehow Job must've sinned to have brought down all this misery on his head. In truth, as the book shows us, Job has done nothing wrong. He truly is a righteous man. One of the things that we often hear when tragedy strikes is, "what have I done that God would do this to me" or words to that effect. The fact of the matter is that while Job doesn't provide us an answer to the question we want, it does provide us a comforting view of an omnipotent God. What God tells Job is that he lacks the appropriate perspective to judge

whether or not God is just. That he is, just a man. In one of the most rousing parts of Scripture, God wonders where Job was when the planets were cast in their orbits or the ocean walled up from the dry land. It's a humbling speech but the point is clear – God is just and in charge but we do not live in a world that's designed to prevent illness, injury or death.

What we do know is that sin has really screwed things up. Broken creation in a manner of speaking. But one of the things that this healing shows us in the Gospel of John is that there is one who has an omnipotent ability to heal in this world of brokenness and that is, of course, God.

In the Gospel of John, there are seven sign-acts that Jesus performs in order to teach His disciples more about what God is doing in and through Him. This healing of the man born blind is but one of them. Like the others, it discloses a particular trait of God's which helps us understand the Almighty One.

There are several additional points this particular passage makes clear. The first point I would like to emphasize is the limitations of physical sight. In the story, we see that the disciples of Jesus ask Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus responds by saying, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." This exchange is significant because it highlights the disciples' assumption that physical blindness is always the result of sin, either on the part of the person who is blind or on the part of their parents. This belief reflects a limited understanding of the nature of sin and the ways in which suffering and hardship can be used to bring about the glory of God. As theologian William Barclay writes, "The disciples had a very primitive and superstitious attitude towards suffering. They believed that all suffering was the result of sin, and that the degree of suffering was an indication of the degree of sin involved. But Jesus challenges this view by showing that God can use even the most difficult circumstances to bring about His purposes."

We can see this truth illustrated in the story itself, as Jesus heals the man born blind, transforming his physical sight and revealing to him the beauty and complexity of the world around him. But the healing is not just physical; it also has spiritual implications, as the man's newfound sight leads him to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and what He represents. This dynamic is echoed in the writings of C.S. Lewis, who once wrote, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Just as the man born blind gains a new perspective on the world through his physical healing, so too can we gain a new perspective on life through our spiritual journey.

The second point I would like to emphasize is the power of transformation. In the story, we see that the Pharisees are initially skeptical of the man's healing, and they question him about the identity of the one who cured him. When he tells them that it was Jesus, they react with hostility, refusing to believe that a sinner, as they wrongly presume Jesus to be, could perform such a miraculous act. This response is significant because it reveals the limitations of human understanding and the ways in which we can become blinded by our own prejudices and assumptions. But it also highlights the power of transformation that can occur when we are willing to open ourselves up to the possibility of something new and different. Karl Barth once wrote, "In Jesus Christ, we have the revelation of God's grace and love, and it is this revelation that transforms us from the inside out." The healing of the man born blind is a powerful example of this transformation, as his encounter with Jesus leads him to a new understanding of the world and his place in it.

I think one of the reasons that Kairos prison ministry is so resonant to me is that we trade in the power of God's transformation. Going into prisons sounds rough but it isn't really. And the reason we do so willingly is that we know that there are guys hungry for transformation in prison. Believe it or not, my experience with inmates has radically transformed how I view prisoners. Prior to working with Kairos, I would've thought that all prisoners were somehow just trying to game the system somehow, some way. But the truth of the matter is what you find in prison is a lot of untreated mental illness – addictions, bipolar disorder, ADHD. But on top of that, most of the guys are hopeful to change whenever it is they're released. These aren't bad people looking to stay bad. No, most of the people are hopeful for change. And that's the power that Jesus Christ brings.

This passage talks about a man being healed of his blindness but Jesus Christ is sovereign over everything. This means that He can heal anything. In the 8th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus encounters a leper. "*When He came down from the mountain, great crowds followed Him. And behold, a leper came to Him and knelt before Him, saying, 'Lord, if You will, You can make me clean.'* And Jesus stretched out His hand and touched Him, saying, '*I will; be clean.*' And immediately his leprosy was cleared." Jesus can heal anything, anytime. That doesn't always mean He will. Just like this man born blind, it could be the case that our

infirmities are means by which God will show out His glory.

I understand this completely. In 2013, I suffered a stroke on a Sunday morning. As best as I can reckon it, it must've happened sometime during Sunday School as that's when, inexplicably, I began having difficulty with my eyesight. Thinking that it was perhaps just a migraine coming on, I pushed forward, even preaching that morning. If you doubt the power of God – according to the people that were there that Sunday and they're not joking, it was one of the best sermons I'd ever preached. Funny thing is, I don't remember a lick of it. Not preaching it, not writing it. Nada. As a consequence of that stroke, I lost a significant percentage of my eyesight. My left vision is fairly bad. It's one of the reasons why if you stand on the left of me at a party, I might not acknowledge you. It isn't that I'm trying to be aloof. No, I just don't see you. That part of my eyesight isn't coming back. But, in the end, I am grateful for the experience and wouldn't change it. Why? Because it was during that time that God was able to heal other parts of me. It took going through that to bring me into a new and wonderful state of reality.

Sometimes, God will heal our diseases just like that blind man. But, on other occasions, physical healing will not come. But let me tell you what always will when we seek healing from the Lord – Spiritual healing.

I don't think I could give you a better example of that than though the life of a woman named Joni Ericson Tada. A gifted athlete, Joni found herself paralyzed after an ill-fated dive. For many years, Tada sought healing from faith healers and doctors around the country. While hopefully their efforts were sincere, none were able to cure her of the quadriplegia that affected her body. Through the years though, Tada began to see healing in a different light. Hearing the Lord's words that it is harder to forgive sin than to heal physical infirmities, Tada began to live a life filled with God's Grace. While the physical transformation never came, a greater healing than that occurred. Hear what she says about it - does God miraculously heal? Sure, He does. But in this broken world, it's still the exception, not the rule. A "no" answer to my request for a miraculous physical healing has meant purged sin, a love for the lost, increased compassion, stretched hope, an appetite for grace, an increase of faith, a happy longing for heaven, a desire to serve, a delight in prayer, and a hunger for His Word. Oh, bless the stern schoolmaster that is my wheelchair!

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.