

Anglican Church Noosa
CONFRONTING JESUS | Jesus the HEALER
Mark 1:40-45
Rev'd Chris Johnson

Our current series is **Confronting Jesus** and we're looking at 8 aspects of Jesus' life and ministry. So far we've looked at Jesus the Son and Jesus the King. And today we come to **Jesus the Healer**. This may be the practical one you've been waiting for. Because I suspect we've all grappled with the question 'Does God heal today?' Because we all experience sickness, we'll all ask this question at one time or another. It is an especially pressing question if our sickness is chronic or life threatening?

Some churches have a theology which goes like this - Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. So just as he healed in the 1st century, he wants to heal today, and all we have to do is ask. It sounds very simple; however the problem arises when there is no healing. The only explanation can be that it has to do with the way we are asking – you don't have enough faith. And that can be particularly devastating to the person who has prayed so earnestly for healing.

I do believe that Jesus wants to heal today but there might be a better way forward than the theology which says he will always heal.

This morning I want us to explore the stories of healing we have just heard read in Mark's Gospel, but set them in the larger context of our eternal salvation and the resurrection bodies for which we wait.

So, we have heard three stories of healing this morning.

1. A man with leprosy is healed.
2. A woman who suffered from bleeding for 12 years is healed.
3. The girl who is 12 years old is raised from the dead.

A common element in all of these stories is **Jesus' touch**.

1. Jesus touched the man with leprosy and said, "*Be clean*".
2. The woman with the bleed, touched Jesus, power went out of him, and she was healed.
3. And then Jesus took the girl who had died by the hand and said, "Little girl, I say to you get up!"

Today we often lay hands on people when we pray for healing, it's no big deal. But back in the first century, Jesus wasn't just enabling healing, he was actually breaking through some religious taboos of the day. The Levitical law said that people were not allowed to touch those with leprosy. Not only were they thought to be contagious, but they were ceremonially unclean. Lepers had to live outside the towns and often find shelter in caves. They were not allowed to enter the Temple or take part in other religious ceremonies.

Jesus could have healed this leper from a distance but he chose to touch him. Imagine what that must have been like for this man - to feel human touch. It was probably the first time in many many years that someone had touched him. It would have been absolutely beautiful; and then to be healed of this dreaded disease.

And what about the woman who had the issue of blood. She was also designated as unclean so once again people were not supposed to make physical contact. But she is desperate! It wasn't just that the doctors hadn't been able to heal her but we're told she had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and spent all she had! Yet instead of getting better she grew worse. We get a lot of detail here don't we. She spent a lot of money but for no result, in fact she got worse.

So she takes the initiative.
She breaks through the social barrier.
She touches Jesus.

Thirdly, we have Jairus' daughter who is very ill. At the start of our story in v23 Jairus pleads with Jesus, *"My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."* You can imagine Jairus' anxiety then as this woman with the bleeding interrupts their journey. You can imagine him shuffling from foot to foot while Jesus seeks out who touched him, while she tells him the whole story of her illness!

The child dies; but Jesus is not concerned. He goes to the home, takes her by the hand and very simply says, *"Little girl, I say to you get up!"*

Once again this is breaking a religious taboo. Touching a dead body made one unclean. Jesus is completely unconcerned. I think Rebecca McLaughlin puts it very well when she says this, "This bleeding woman and this dead girl could no more make Jesus unclean than a speck of dust could blot out the sun."

So Jesus touch in these healings is very important. On many occasions Jesus simply speaks a word and people are healed; but he chooses to touch. He shows his Lordship over the Jewish laws about clean and unclean, but even more importantly he shows his incredible compassion for two seriously ill people.

It is interesting the way Mark couples these two stories of healing together - the woman with the bleed and the raising of the little girl. The stories are different yet have so much in common.

They are **different** in that Jairus is a synagogue leader, he has status and public recognition, he is male, he approaches Jesus.

The bleeding woman on the other hand is of course female, she is chronically ill over many years and socially isolated, she has no status, she takes the initiative in touching Jesus.

The stories seem so different, however, there are **important similarities** between the two stories.

Both of the people healed are **female** - one a grown woman, the other a young girl. But the fact that Jesus, a male, is concerned for them and heals them shows his great compassion. In the first century women were often seen as second class citizens, but not to Jesus. It is significant that both the people healed were women.

In both situations the people involved are **desperate**.
For the woman, she is incurably ill.
For the little girl she is terminally ill.
In both cases these people are seriously ill and desperate.

In both incidents we find the **number 12** –
the woman had a 12 year ailment, the girl was 12 years old.
12 was seen as a number representing Israel, maybe because there were 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus has just returned from the western side of the Sea of Galilee which was Gentile territory. He is now back in Israel and showing compassion for God's people, the Jews.
In fact he said I have come for the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

Both of these stories are about **fear and faith**. They are about turning fear into faith. They are about the power of Jesus to take faltering faith and turn it into joy. There is an old saying that **faith** is simply fear which has said its prayers.

We are told Jairus pleads earnestly with Jesus to come and heal his daughter. This is faltering faith praying for Jesus to make a difference. When the news comes that his daughter has died, what does Jesus say, *"Don't be afraid; Just believe."* Jairus dutifully follows Jesus to his house even although he must be thinking the situation is hopeless.

He follows Jesus no matter what.

The woman with the bleed hears about Jesus being in town and seeks him out.

We don't really know anything about her faith, but she thinks if she just touches his clothes she will be healed. She wants to stay anonymous, but Jesus is persistent and seeks her out.

We're told, 'she falls at his feet, trembling with fear, and tells him the whole truth.' V33. Then she hears what must have been the most beautiful words, *"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."*

The life of discipleship is a constant journey from fear into faith. Bringing not just our illnesses but all our worries and anxieties to Jesus, and touching him, but more importantly, letting him touch us and give us his salvation and peace.

So Jesus healed in the 1st century, I now want to address the question, does he want to heal in the 21st century?

I think Rebecca McLaughlin deals with this very well in her book *Confronting Jesus*. She shares the very personal story of her diagnosis with breast cancer. In fact she says, "As I write this, I've just returned home from having three lumps biopsied. The doctor told me there's a 50% chance there cancerous.... As I write these words, I don't know if I'm fine or very sick. I don't know if I'm facing surgeries or chemotherapy or worse. I don't know if I'll have to tell my kids their mummy has cancer. Because I believe what the Gospels say, I deeply believe that Jesus has the power to heal. But I don't know if he will."

We're left hanging throughout the chapter but at the end she says, "I've just loaded my kids, all wet from swimming, into the car when the doctor called, 'Good news,' she said, 'we don't think you have cancer.'"

She talks about being quite young to be getting those lumps, however, she shares she has a friend who is 6 years younger who was recently diagnosed with advanced breast cancer. She says her friend also trusts in Jesus and has prayed for healing but is going through another hateful round of chemotherapy that very week.

To help us better understand why God doesn't always answer our prayers for healing, Rebecca McLaughlin gives us a bigger context. She says that our greatest problem is not physical illness but a spiritual cancer that is far more serious.

She tells the story of the call of Matthew, the tax collector. The story is in Luke Chapter 5 where Jesus calls Matthew, and immediately he leaves his tax office and follows. What's more he throws a party to celebrate his newfound faith and invites all his mates and Jesus. Presumably he wants them to meet Jesus. The Pharisees are scandalised. They ask Jesus and his disciples, *"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners."* Jesus replies, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."*

Jesus is not saying that some are righteous, and some sinners and he has just come for the sinners. No, he has his tongue in cheek, he's come to call everyone, because we're all sinners.

Jesus words are dangerous. They challenge the self-righteous pharisee in every human heart. They challenge us to see our most serious sickness is sin.

- Sin cuts people off from God.

- Sin in fact takes people to hell.

- Jesus warned about that many times.

What we would like to treat with a band aid, Jesus says is even worse than cancer and needs radical surgery; and in fact that is why he came.

Let me quote from Rebecca McLaughlin again. "My guess is most of us are more afraid of physical sickness than some nebulous spiritual kind. Right now, as I await my diagnosis, it's tempting to feel like the most important question is, do I have cancer? But if Jesus is the Son of God, if Jesus is King, then it is not the most important question. Our most pressing sickness is spiritual. We are all terminally ill. Without a doctor sent by God himself, there is no hope. Conversely, if our bodies are wasting away but we are held in Jesus' arms, we are fundamentally well."

I want to come back to that question the man with leprosy asked Jesus,
"If you are willing, you can make me clean."

And of course the question for us, Is Jesus willing to heal today? I'm sure that he is willing, but the problem is there are many times when healing doesn't happen, and there is a great mystery about this.

However, this is no different from the 1st century, in that there were many people in Jesus' day whom he didn't heal. If you look at the scene in Mark Chapter 1, just before this story of the healing of the leper, you will see that Jesus has been in Capernaum,

- he has had a busy time teaching in the synagogue, casting out impure spirits and

- in the afternoon he's gone to Simon Peter's home,

- he's healed Peter's mother-in-law who had a fever,

- the whole town has gathered at the door of the house where he heals many people with various diseases and drives out demons.

- Very early the next morning he gets up to pray,

- his disciples come looking for him because the crowds are turning up, presumably more sick people wanting healing because the word has got around.

- What does Jesus do, in v38 he says, *"Let us go somewhere else to nearby villages, so I can preach there also."* Notice the priority of preaching.

- But it does mean leaving many needy people in Capernaum unhealed.

We might also think about the question of resurrection. We have records of Jesus raising only three people,

1. Jairus' daughter here in Mark 5
2. The widow's son at Nain in Luke 7
3. Lazarus in John 11

There must have been plenty of other people who died at that time with grieving relatives. Why did Jesus not help them? Jesus' ministry was actually very limited and seemingly very selective.

Tom Wright I think makes a very good point when he says this.

"These questions miss the whole point of the larger story that Mark is telling us."

Just as Jesus wasn't coming to be a one man liberation movement in the traditional revolutionary sense, so he wasn't coming to be a one man emergency medical centre.

He was indeed starting a revolution, he was indeed bringing God's healing power, but his aim went deeper; these things were signs of the real revolution, the real healing, that God was to accomplish through his death and resurrection. Signposts are important but they are not the destination."

So yes, Jesus can and does heal but it is only a signpost pointing us to the coming Kingdom when with resurrection bodies we will be completely healed. The chief signpost is Jesus' death and resurrection.

I don't have any simple answer as to why there are times when Jesus doesn't heal, except to say that his healing is never magic or put on for a show, it is but a pointer to something far bigger and more wonderful that is yet to come.

Rebecca McLaughlin says, "If we trust Jesus, he will always heal us in the end. But death may be a stop along the way."

And let me conclude with this final paragraph from her chapter on healing.

"If there are evil forces in this world, we need an overwhelming, demon crushing, darkness killing champion. We need someone who will separate us out from darkness and wrap us up in light. We need the doctor who can heal our bodies and our souls, the doctor who can take our pain, the doctor who can even raise the dead. Jesus in the Gospels, heals with words and touch and spit. The hands of the King are the hands of a healer. But this King was mocked and hit and spat upon as he went to the cross where he took out illnesses and bore our diseases. He died almost 2000 years ago, but his scarred healing hands reach out for you and me today - if we will only come to him."

My friends if you would like prayer for healing or any other need there will be opportunity at the end of the service. Please come down the front for prayer.