

The Rev. Amanda Eiman  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after The Epiphany  
February 4, 2018  
Mark 1:29-39

Healing. We all desire it, or have experienced it, in one way or another.

Sometimes the healing may be physical: A skinned knee, a broken bone, or healing from surgery or serious disease.

Sometimes it may be emotional: the healing of a broken heart, or feelings of loneliness, or sadness. And sometimes the healing needed is mental or spiritual - a trauma has interfered with healthy thinking. Or we wish to repair lost faith or hope.

No matter how we classify it, there is perhaps no desire more powerful than the desire to be healed. We desire that sick or broken bodies be made well, stressed relationships be mended, and wounded places in our souls restored.

And the good news is that when we are in need of it, God deeply desires healing for us too. So maybe it is no surprise that the very first actions of Jesus in Mark's Gospel are those of healing. He casts

out an unclean spirit, and then, as we hear today, he heals Simon's mother in law from her fever. Later, as the whole city gathered around, he cured many more and the healing continued as he went throughout Galilee.

It's interesting to note how Jesus heals. There are no complicated action steps required, no prescriptions. Sometimes there is a desire but more often just a touch. A coming near. Or being face to face. It's those who simply come near to Jesus, or those whom he touches, who are made well.

And why? Why is it that simply being near to Jesus is healing?

Well of course there are many reasons, but this week I was speaking with a friend who was telling me about a conversation she was having with her husband. In the midst of the conversation she explained that her husband called her bluff about something she said she was going to do. He turned to her and said, "oh come on Jackie, I KNOW you. You wouldn't do that!"

She brushed off his comment at first -but afterward she kept thinking about his words. "***I know you***". And the more she thought about them the more she realized how very true they were. Her husband of ten years really did know her. He knew her strengths and her weaknesses. He knew her good sides and her bad. He knew about her beauty and her scars, her gifts and her imperfections.

And he knew these things about her because when people are in close relationship with each other the things about us that remain hidden at a distance become revealed up close. The invisible becomes visible. The unknown parts become known.

But this process – the coming near to someone and becoming revealed, is not always easy. It requires vulnerability. It requires letting our guard down.

And maybe when we've let our guard down in the past it's been a positive experience. Maybe we've shown ourselves to another and have been met with comfort, blessing, and joy.

But maybe for some of us it hasn't been this way. I bet that there are too many of us in this room that have come close to someone else in our lives, and we've let our true self be revealed but in response we've been met with critique or judgment. And critique and judgment isn't fun. It isn't healing. It really hurts. And we don't want to feel that way again. So the next time we are coming close to someone, we resist.

But things are different with God. When we come close to Christ, or when Christ comes close to us – which is always happening by the way, because God is always inviting us near - we may be hesitant at first, because of past experience.

But perhaps little by little, we learn that when we draw near to God, we are never met with anything less than love. And love heals.

So perhaps in the stories of Scripture when people become near to Jesus there is more going on than we know. Their coming near to him strips away all of the facades and all of the masks of who they are. Because love can do that. It can pierce through anything – even

death.

So in coming close to God, our true selves are revealed and we connect with God. And through that connection and God's love, we are made whole.

I can't tell you how many times I have witnessed a life transformed by God in this very way as a person takes part in Christian community.

The lost, or lonely or overwhelmed and even you and I come and worship, learn, and serve together. We bring our broken selves and our seeking spirits and are met by Christ. And very often Christ is in the form of the person sitting next to us in the pew, or in the words of a prayer, or the notes and text of a hymn...

...And we are drawn close. A balm touches us. And we are healed.

We are healed and set free to be whole - to be the person God created us to be. So that we might live into our God-given identity and potential, claiming our calling as children of God, and joining God in the mission of loving and blessing the world.

You know that quote from St. Catherine of Sienna – become who you were created to be and you will set the world on fire. We can set the world on fire with God’s healing love in our lives.

So, often the depth and breadth of healing happens in this life. God answers our prayers and heals us. And helps us be who we are created to be at our fullest potential.

But sometimes this healing takes a bit longer. Or doesn’t happen in the way that we would like it. And that is why the promise of healing doesn't end with this life. The promise of healing extends beyond the door of death, into God's kingdom – beyond the here and now.

And that’s why the church has that great prayer where we pray *God by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and thing which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by whim through whom all things were made – Jesus Christ.*

So God doesn't give up. God gently whispers our name until we turn, until the whole world turns - to him. It may be bit by bit – or all at once, but one day in this life or the next, all will come near to God. All will be revealed. All will be healed.

So in what ways do you and I need healing today? In what ways is the Holy Spirit inviting and empowering you to be healed by coming near and being known? As we ponder these questions, may we all have the courage to be vulnerable, and to trust in God's healing love. So that we, in our fullest potential, and in being who we are created to be, can set the world on fire.

Amen.