

# Intro Points

- Introduce self

In today's discussion we'll be looking at Mathew's Jesus as healer. When I was approached to be a volunteer for this, I was not aware that I was going to be creating the content for it. I was totally intimidated, but I slept on it and decided to take the plunge.

When it comes to this discussion, "I am you, and you are me". We are operating at the same level.

As I journeyed into this, I realized that I had to make a choice. Would I rely on academic studies to prepare for this, or would I take another approach, and instead share my experience to inspire you to harvest meaning that will live with you?

We have little time and much to explore. I ask that you keep an open and sharp mind.

I chose just two readings, both are familiar, that show Jesus as healer. I'd like for you to make them personal.

- **I'll get started with the first reading using** guided meditation:

Please close your eyes, relax yourself and get comfortable.

Please take a deep slow breath, hold for just a count of 2, and slowly release it.

In your mind's eye please imagine yourself in a typical Sunday service here at St. Paul's.

I will now read the gospel according to Matthew:

## **Matthew 8:1-4 "Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy" <sup>1</sup>**

**8** When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. <sup>2</sup> A man with leprosy<sup>[a]</sup> came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

<sup>3</sup> Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. <sup>4</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Continue to keep your eyes closed - Time has stopped. Your mind is free.

Reflect on these questions and focus on the ones that spark interest:

- Do you take this passage at face value?
- What questions or feelings does it arouse?
- What would you ask Matthew about his passage?
- Would you expect anything different of Jesus?

Open your eyes and catch your breath. Refer to the handout, the passage and questions are there. Speak whatever thought you have: Good, bad, indifferent; interested, bored, belief or disbelief, even neutrality. There is no judgement. Let's talk

[5 to 7 Minutes] - (Capture some feedback notes)

When I read this, I did not know what was meant by "the gift Moses commanded". (It's in the very last part of the passage)

<sup>4</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

I researched academic papers and the answer was far longer than I was hoping for. It called the books of Leviticus, Hebrews, John, Psalms, Isaiah, and Ephesians! Good Lord!

The "actual gift", its description and symbolism come from the Hebrew Bible. It involves all the usual incantations that in our modern context takes further study to appreciate. Things like birds, strange plants, purging with blood, holy waters – etc. Too much to go into here, I'll leave it to the scholars. The detail of the ritual is not the important part. It's the symbolism that Jesus portrays in the context of a time when religion was everything. It was faith, law, social standards, and community. Anything that deviated was ostracized, and the priests had the authority to call judgement and forgiveness. By enacting the gift that Moses prescribed, priests had the power to forgive sins and declare one healed. Talk about power and authority!

Transport yourself back to the time of Matthew, Jesus, and the leper. Here is what you are faced with:

'Leprosy is a picture of sin since it defiles, spreads, and destroys a person. The gift that was given to the priest is used for the judgment of sin and the cleansing of the leper.'<sup>2</sup>

Physical ailments at the time were considered a sign of sinfulness, even God's retaliation for wrongdoing, and an open testament to the public for one's transgressions.

[3 minutes] - As the leper, how does this make you feel?

Like you, I personalized this and asked myself who has the power to judge my direct association to God? Is it faith by prescription as commanded by a priest, and how does this heal me?

Jesus was sticking it to the man, but without ego because he said to the leper don't tell anyone, just the priest. This was far more important than all the academic studies I came across. It told me that my direct relationship to God, with Jesus as the symbolic conduit, is all that counts.

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I would like to take you on another journey. I would like for you to pretend you are the person being healed. Get comfortable, close your eyes again, breathe in slowly and deeply, hold for 2, . . . , exhale slowly.

Let's imagine ourselves in the center of the following reading. Translate the details of this reading into visual images, no matter how minor the detail. This account has a woman and girl who are being healed. It does not matter which you imagine to be, you could be both if you like, but put yourself in at least one of their shoes.

### **Matthew 9:18-26 "Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman" <sup>1</sup>**

<sup>18</sup> [~~While he was saying this,~~] a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." <sup>19</sup> Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

<sup>20</sup> Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. <sup>21</sup> She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

<sup>22</sup> Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment.

<sup>23</sup> When Jesus entered the synagogue leader's house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, <sup>24</sup> he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup> After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. <sup>26</sup> News of this spread through all that region.

With eyes still closed, and images fresh in your mind, consider these questions:

- What simple gesture by Jesus and the women were mentioned several times in this reading?
- Was there anything Jesus said that seems odd?
- What does the synagogue leader mean to you if anything?

Now open your eyes, catch your breath, and let's talk -

[5 to 7 minutes] - (Audience input)

Thanks for your insights. When I first read this, I had some ideas until I looked into more scholarly studies. These studies filled in some vital details that I'll mention here in brief <sup>4</sup>:

- This passage establishes Jesus' authority over death
- Scholars make comparison to Luke's and Mark's gospels around this same passage. I would strongly encourage you to read their versions on your own and compare it to Matthew's. For sure Matthew's version is the Cliff Note version, hands down.
- That was just the start. Scholars talked about the significance of the synagogue leader coming to Jesus, the connection to overcoming worldly death through salvation, quotes from Kings, Acts, Revelations, and self-references to the other synoptic gospels.
- Even Isa came into play - does anyone know what that refers to? Isa the Muslim interpretation of Jesus, and so named in the Koran. He is treated as an important prophet rather than as The Son of God.

I was glad to be exposed to all this information, and I strongly encourage that you too make some attempt to appreciate such scalarly analysis. I came to appreciate that Matthew's reductionist style and emphasis on the core business at hand is timeless. I became acutely aware that getting overly invested in studies runs a risk which I'll explain shortly.

I now tread the dangerous path where liberties of the amateur non-scholar flourishes into wild conjecture. I beg that you don't take this as an imposition, but simply as a spark that invites you to find your own center of thought. Here is my personal reaction and commentary, And a sermon – of sorts.

By way of my wife Audrey, who had no knowledge of my machinations around this presentation, is a quote she read to me and that I will share with you:

Do not confuse understanding with a larger vocabulary. Sacred writings are beneficial in stimulating desire for inner realization, if one stanza at a time is slowly assimilated. Otherwise, continual intellectual study may result in vanity, false satisfaction, and undigested knowledge. – Quote from Swami Sri Yukteswar <sup>5</sup>. (Yuke Tesz War)

As in the quote from the swami, I did not want my intellect to distance me from the emotional intelligence of my heart. When Faith is “PRESCRIBED” and adored to that point where it is “OBJECTIFIED”, it becomes passive. I was once told that if you are not struggling with faith, then you’re not thinking much about it. From the few passages we covered it appears that the saved had made it look simple; they had faith, they believed in Jesus, he cured them, they were cleansed.

I beg to differ. Prior to Jesus these people were publicly the guilty, the sinful, and the punished by God. Talk about struggling with faith. Imagine living as an outcast, through no fault of your own, victim of circumstance or disease, and expected to give praise according to “PRESCRIBED” faith. Talk about a struggle! Faith under these conditions was not easy.

I asked myself why these accounts of Jesus’ healing illustrate blind faith entrusted so freely? Jesus to me is symbolic of that intuitive inner voice that does not “PRESCRIBE”, but rather demonstrates through simple kind gestures the kind of faith that breaks through the barriers of pious religiosity. If you need help and someone simply extends their hand with sympathetic eyes, does this not reach deeper than formal ritual and directives? Does it not invite the instinctive connection we harbor between us to be shared with another? If not permanently, are we not at least temporarily lifted in this transaction of trust and faith? That illusive but trusting faith can only happen when we willingly share our humanity with each other.

Our modern lives are not steeped in the times of the Hebrew or Christian bibles, but the message and influences apply. What have we substituted for “PRESCRIBED” laws and practices from the past? What has influenced our thinking, our sense of community, acceptance of others in our modern world? Has the politics of our current era filled that void? And what about our worries around our economic state, or even the wellbeing of our physical health in this pandemic world? Is Jesus’ healing relegated only to the physical, or is it meant to underscore the power of humanity to heal beyond the physical? Where does the intersection of miracle applied to the physical . . . balance out against the value of humanity applied to healing of soul, society, and nurturing of good will?

The subject of faith is complex as it applies to the miracles of Jesus’ healing. Should they be taken at face value, is Jesus only a miracle worker, or is this all hyperbole of events that may have had simpler roots but over time grown into grand lore? I am not suggesting we tackle that here, but I will offer the following. The physical acts and healing miracles are not what interest me, but the connections behind what makes it whole are.

Healing to me is the product of ingredients that are overlapping and inseparable. In every gospel account the humanity demonstrated by Jesus was done against the prevailing views of the time. But to demonstrate humanity you must know how to love. Without love there can be no humanity. Faith is the courage that drives the action of love with humanity.

I concluded that this inseparable trio, LOVE, HUMANITY, and FAITH, yields the product of healing. For me Jesus is symbolic of this perfection. That is what I came out of through this exercise. What might it mean for you?

I hope you make your discovery each time you read a gospel about healing. Your journey starts now.

Is there anything anyone would like to add?

### **Matthew's Gospel – Jesus as Healer**

Some things to consider when reading about the miracles of Jesus' healing:

Anyone can be in someone else's shoes. How does that shape your view of another person?

Jesus does his healing with simple gestures – touching, bringing one back into community, with simple humanity, with faith. How does this influence you?

What is significant to you, the physical healing, or the soulful healing?

How does this modify your approach to reading or hearing any gospel?

What kind of healing do you need? Don't be afraid to ask for it!

How might objectification\* change our relationship to Jesus and the gospels?

Are there any parallels in modern society that are analogous to the time of Jesus that affects our faith, humanity, and love of other?

Love (God) + Humanity (Applied Love) + Faith (Courage) = Healing How can we spread it around?

(\* the act or an instance of treating a person as an object or thing)