

“Healing and a Cure”

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Jonah 2:1-9

Mark 2:1-12

Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish:

“I called out to the LORD in my distress, and he answered me.

From the belly of the underworld I cried out for help; you have heard my voice.

Jonah 2:1-2

Let us pray... O God,

You know us in our coming and going – and you can read our thoughts from afar.

You are acquainted with all our ways, the joy and suffering of being human.

You know our prayers even before we say them, and you have us covered by your active concern,
round about, above, and below; It is all too much for *us* to grasp – but not for you.

Where could we ever go to be apart from your presence – even if we tried?

Amen

How do you think of Jesus?

Is he sitting enthroned on high, as a giant judging the world?

Is he bearded and wearing long hair like Sunday School pictures of years ago?

Is he adorned in an immaculate white robe with a red cloak draped like a sash?

Is he a ‘sweaty Galilean’ speaking wisdom?

Is he formless and without gender, yet recognizable as God?

However you envision Christ, that should depend on how you need to see Christ –
and so long as that is in terms of your highest good, that’s good enough.

But even so, we all must take care not to take our individual visions too seriously.

We ‘must not let the metaphor take over’.

Because if we insist on only one way to picture Jesus –

assuming all others are wrong, then such a vision invariably becomes an idol.

The Gospels serve to give us a picture of him through the words of scripture
about what he said and did.

There is no specific physical description of Jesus of Nazareth,

but what we do have are dynamic stories about him interacting with people.

The Apostles Creed serves to provide the lowest common denominator

that could be said about who he is – leaving out any mention of miracles.

So, it is up to the narratives of the Gospels to give us more details

about *who* Jesus was – and therefore, who God is through Jesus Christ.

In this context, the anecdotes about his miracles help to gain some insight –
not as proofs, but as illustrations of his character.

What we find is someone who lived an extraordinary life as a teacher, healer,
wonderworker – and ultimately, heroic scapegoat and savior.

Whether or not these stories literally happened the way they are found in the Bible,
is subject to debate.

The bigger question is “Why are they in the Bible and
what do they tell us about God through Christ?”

Willard, p.2

Jesus' role as 'healer' is central to his identity, pulling together these other roles as an explanation for what he was all about – as a life-giving 'Savior'. There are many stories that specifically tell about how he healed people by curing them from some disability or by casting out an evil spirit. Rather than looking for facts to prove they happened a certain way, what truths can be discovered to help us in our time when we need healing?

Though Mark 2:1-12 is traditionally called 'the healing of the paralytic', I refer to this story as "the healing of the paralyzed person". This is not just about being 'PC' – 'politically correct' – a term which itself has become loaded with negative connotations. Instead, this is an example of inclusive language as a way of remembering that this is a person suffering with a handicapping condition. By practicing inclusive language, we change how we think about people who are challenged by disability and this encourages them to think more positively about themselves.

Words matter – even though as children, we were told, 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.' There is truth in what that proverb means: Internally, you must not buy into someone else's label of you, someone else's narrative about you. Yet you must also have your own inner dialogue of saying, 'I am' and 'I can', to reframe how you think about things – not as "make-believe" to escape or blame someone else for your situation, but to claim your self-worth and your responsibility to find healing – even when there is no cure.

There is a difference between 'a healing' and 'a cure' – and the first time I learned about this concept was from a book I received from friends who work in the FL state prison system. The book is titled, Houses of Healing: A Prisoner's Guide to Inner Power & Freedom, and serves as a guide for prisoners to come to terms with 'childhood wounding', grief, anger, stress, coping with one's past, to find forgiveness as well as to forgive, to grow in empathy and to grow in the emotional/spiritual maturity of a positive self-image.

<https://www.amazon.com/Houses-Healing-Prisoners-Guide-Freedom/dp/0964493306>

The main theme of this book's program says that 'healing' is possible – even for those in prison with no hope of release, to find liberation-behind-bars. Too often we consign people – especially people in prison, to some category to be dismissed as victims of their own misfortune. Prisoners may seem to be unlikely 'victims', but we are challenged as Christians, to remember Jesus called us to 'love [our enemies]'. This is particularly important when someone has served their time and they seek to be reintegrated into society, to find a job, and to vote.

Willard, p.3

With regard to the paralyzed person in this Gospel story,
his companions were so determined to get help for him from Jesus,
that they climbed up on the roof of the place where Jesus was staying –
which was his mother's house!

Then, they tore open a hole, big enough to lower their friend down to Jesus.
When you think of it, there must have been quite a mess –
with sticks and dried mud all over the place!

So when Jesus says, 'Your sins are forgiven',
he could have been talking to those four friends, too –
though his mother probably was having a fit just the same!

The religious experts sitting there – frazzled no doubt by all the commotion,
were really upset by Jesus' declaration of forgiveness,
something only a priest was authorized to do.

Jesus responds to them by equating 'forgiveness' with 'healing'
when he tells the paralyzed person,
"Get up! Pick up your stretcher and go on home..."

Now, we don't know what caused the person's paralysis –
whether it was a condition from birth or the result of a crippling injury,
and in that case, whether it was by an accident...
or reckless behavior which would have required forgiveness?

Shame can cripple someone as bad as a physical infirmity,
so this was part of Jesus' intention, too.

In this story, this person has a 'cure' – he is not only healed and forgiven,
but is also cured of his infirmity.

Unfortunately, when someone these days has a crippling condition
with no hope for a cure, they are not going to find this story very helpful –
in a literal sense.

But I know this particular healing story has a real life parallel
with someone who was injured through no fault of his own.

Tom Boomershine – the founder of the Network of Biblical Storytellers,
had been gassing up his car when a truck crashed into him.

He woke up the next day in a hospital bed and was told his legs were shattered
and that he would never walk again.

Over months of rehabilitation, he would recite this story of the paralyzed person
along with the psalms, as a focus for his healing – which led to a cure.

I have known Tom for 30 years – and even visited him this summer,
and I have never seen him limp!

He credits being a runner and playing tennis as a helpful precondition for this cure,
but Tom calls this text *his* story.

The paralyzed person and the healing Christ were Tom's companions
on the road to recovery – finding hope where there is no hope.

Willard, p.4

Finding hope where there is no hope – ‘Making a way out of no way’,
was an inscription on one of the displays at the Smithsonian African-American
Museum in Washington, DC.

It characterizes the journey of African-Americans in white America
and what may be called ‘traveling mercies’ in a spiritual sense.

It is that notion of “going with” – that God goes with us through our suffering,
and this is very much the way black Christians interpret Christ – a Black Jesus
who fearlessly confronts the devils, disease, and desolation of this world.

This is a ‘Theology of the Cross’ – which emphasizes the shared suffering
of Christ with humanity, in sharp contrast with a ‘Theology of Glory’ –
where Christ enthroned above, judges a broken and sinful humanity.

Our lesson from Jonah 2:1-9 is the Prophet Jonah’s prayer
while in the belly of the whale, the belly of the beast, crying out to God.

Like a person trapped in a hospital bed with a paralyzing condition,
Jonah names his distress – and concludes with an affirmation
and a promise of thanksgiving for the help he believes he will surely get –
“Deliverance belongs to the LORD [One Who Is God]”.
Deliverance, forgiveness, salvation, healing...

We see Jonah’s cry from the depths reflected in the desperate actions
of the paralyzed person’s companions in Mark 2:1-12.

We can also find this call for help along with a desperate hope voiced in Psalm 139,
of God high and lifted up, yet descends to be with us no matter where we are...

O LORD,

thou hast searched me and known me!

²*Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up;
thou discernest my thoughts from afar.*

³*Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
and art acquainted with all my ways.*

⁴*Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*

⁵*Thou dost beset me behind and before, and layest thy hand upon me.*

⁶*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.*

⁷*Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

⁸*If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!*

If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!

⁹*If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*

¹⁰*even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.*

¹¹*If I say, “Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night,”*

¹²*even the darkness is not dark to thee, the night is bright as the day;
for darkness is as light with thee.*

Deliverance, forgiveness, salvation, healing – even a cure,
belongs to the One Who Is God through Christ our Lord...

Amen

*Our lesson today from Jonah 2:1-9 of the Common English Bible version
is a prayer to God that is similar to Psalm 139 as an example of
a cry to God out of one's emotional distress...*

Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish:

² "I called out to the LORD in my distress, and he answered me.

From the belly of the underworld I cried out for help;
you have heard my voice.

³ You had cast me into the depths in the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounds me.

All your strong waves and rushing water passed over me.

⁴ So I said, 'I have been driven away from your sight.

Will I ever again look on your holy temple?

⁵ Waters have grasped me to the point of death;
the deep surrounds me.

Seaweed is wrapped around my head

⁶ at the base of the undersea mountains.

I have sunk down to the underworld;

its bars held me with no end in sight.

But you brought me out of the pit.'

⁷ When my endurance was weakening,

I remembered the LORD,

and my prayer came to you,

to your holy temple.

⁸ Those deceived by worthless things lose their chance for mercy.

⁹ But me, I will offer a sacrifice to you with a voice of thanks.

That which I have promised, I will pay.

Deliverance belongs to the LORD!"

¹⁰ Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto the dry land.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Inspired by Mark 2:1-12

**AND JESUS RETURNED TO CAPERNAUM
AFTER A FEW DAYS.**

**AND WHEN IT WAS HEARD THAT HE WAS AT HOME,
SO MANY PEOPLE WERE GATHERED THERE
THAT IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO GET THROUGH THE DOOR.
AND HE WAS PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD –
THE WAY TO LIVE TO THEM.**

**THEN, ‘THEY’ CAME,
FOUR PEOPLE CARRYING A PARALYZED PERSON.
AND WHEN THEY COULD NOT REACH JESUS
THROUGH THE CROWD, THEY GOT UP ON THE ROOF.
AND WHEN THEY HAD TORN A HOLE BIG ENOUGH,
THEY LET DOWN THE STRETCHER
ON WHICH THE PARALYZED PERSON LAY.**

**WHEN JESUS SAW THEIR FAITH,
HE SAID TO THE PARALYZED PERSON,
“MY DEAR, YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN.”**

**NOW, SOME RELIGIOUS EXPERTS WERE SITTING THERE,
DIALOGUING LIKE THIS AMONGST THEMSELVES;
“WHAT IS THIS?”
“THIS IS BLASPHEMY.”
“WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS, BUT GOD ALONE?”**

**RIGHT THEN, JESUS, PERCEIVING IN HIS SPIRIT,
THAT THEY WERE DEBATING LIKE THIS, SAID TO THEM,
“WHY DO YOU QUESTION THIS IN YOUR HEARTS?
WHICH IS EASIER TO SAY TO A PARALYZED PERSON?
‘YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN’, OR PERHAPS, ‘GET UP AND WALK’...
BUT THAT YOU MAY KNOW THAT
THE SON OF MAN, THE TRUE HEIR OF HUMANITY,
HAS AUTHORITY ON EARTH TO FORGIVE SINS...”**

**HE SAID TO THE PARALYZED PERSON,
“I AM TELLING YOU TO GET UP,
TAKE UP YOUR STRETCHER... AND GO ON HOME.”**

**AND THAT PERSON GOT UP, PICKED UP HIS STRETCHER,
AND PRACTICALLY DANCED OUT THE FRONT DOOR!
SO, THAT THEY WERE ALL ASTONISHED, AND SAID,
“PRAISE GOD! WE NEVER SAW ANYTHING LIKE THIS!
PRAISE GOD!”**