

This morning's passage is likely a familiar one: a story of healing that we'll be reading from Luke 5 (if you want to turn there), which is found almost verbatim in Mark 2, and very closely echoed in Matthew 9.

While this passage is rich in opportunities to dig deep into the who, what, where and why of theology, today I'm going to instead use it as a template to unpack 3 aspects, 3 things present in every healing or miraculous encounter in the ministry of Christ - I love the way **this** passage names these 3 components. These three aspects of Jesus' ministry will then propel us into a continuation of the call Peter has been building over the past month of Living Into Our Covenant, they will connect into Spark Sunday and the start of the program year, and (hopefully) launch an invitation to join in the life and ministry of First Pres and beyond. And I'm going to try to do all of that in roughly 10 minutes. Buckle up.

Before I read it, the 3 components I'll suggest are present in every miraculous interaction and story of Jesus healing are: 1) a direct connection to the power or will of God; 2) an opportunity for a person or persons to grow in faith; 3) Jesus being intentionally present. See if you can hear those aspects in this morning's passage:

Luke 5:17-26

¹⁷ One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. ¹⁸ Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. ¹⁹ When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

²⁰ When Jesus saw **their** faith, he said, "**Friend, your** sins are forgiven."

²¹ The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

²² Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ²³ **Which is easier**: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ²⁴ But I want

you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. ²⁶ Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Did you catch the 3 components? Let's use this passage to expand upon them really quickly.

1. A direct connection to the power or will of God. This is likely the most self-explanatory of the 3. In v 17 Luke names that "the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick." That's pretty clear...but other ways named throughout the Gospels: Jesus repeatedly names that he is doing the will of the Father, or that he can only do the will of the one who sent him; over and over the people are astounded by the acts Jesus performs, realizing that they go far beyond normal acts of coincidence or minor miracles; and finally, another way, people of all walks of life from Simeon and Anna in the temple, blind Bartimeus, the Disciples, to the Roman guards after the Crucifixion, to even the demons possessing the man in the tombs call out and recognize Jesus as Son of God. In every instance, in every circumstance, there is a recognition or proof that what Jesus is about, what Jesus is doing, and who Jesus is, is firmly rooted in and dependent on the power or will of God. Nothing is done "just because" and nothing is done that doesn't point to and attempt to further the Kingdom of God.

2. The second component we see in Jesus' interactions is an opportunity for a person or persons to grow in faith. Throughout the Gospels, faith is offered as a main connector to the Kingdom of God and Jesus' power, and it's often said that the faith of the friends or the faith of the individual is a reason healing happens. And while the faith of the individual is lifted as important, almost as important (I'd suggest) is the opportunity to grow in faith presented to those watching the interaction unfold. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and other religious leaders are repeatedly challenged in this area, and the crowds looking on are given this chance as well...and are often named as

being amazed and coming to or growing in faith. Jesus also challenges the faith of the Disciples over and over, commenting on their lack of faith before or during miraculous encounters. This desire for faith to be increased flows directly out of point number 1: Jesus wasn't doing any of this for His own gain or prestige, but instead to inspire a deepening faith in God. Christ knew that the amazement produced by the miraculous wouldn't be enough, and that the reliance on seeing miracles wouldn't produce the desired outcome of the Kingdom growing. It would only be when the hearers could hear; when the seers could actually see; when faith took root that the Kingdom of God would be expanded in a real, tangible way. The miracles and healings were important (certainly to the ones receiving them), but right behind were the opportunities presented to others to grow in faith produced by the interactions.

3. In the miracles and healing interactions, Jesus was intentionally and intensely present. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus takes intentional time for conversation, for a meal, for people to speak their need. The interactions are intensely personal, like with the Woman at the Well, the Syrophenician woman, the Demoniac in the tombs, Jairus' daughter, but also with Peter and the other Disciples. Jesus stops. Jesus listens and converses. A miracle or a healing happens.

The meat of this point lies in the "why?" Because it provides dignity and value to the individual; because it engages the person or the viewers and invites them into faith; because it encourages wholeness of the individual. In multiple instances the interaction doesn't stop with the miracle or healing—it continues into restoring that person to their family or community. In today's passage, Jesus could have stopped with the blessing of "your sins are forgiven" to the man. Instead, Jesus gives the double blessing then of "take up your mat..." and do what? To the man Jesus says "take up your mat and GO HOME." Restoration. Throughout His ministry, Jesus knew that points 1 and 2 came to fulfillment through the radical act of being intentionally present to see, affirm, and love on the whole person. There are dozens of words that could describe Jesus' ministry, but a Ministry of Presence absolutely needs to be considered—John 1:14 "the Word became flesh and

made his dwelling among us”; “the Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood.”

I said earlier that this was going to launch us into Spark Sunday, so I better get going on detailing how. If we say that the 3 aspects were evident in every interaction of Jesus’ ministry, the next logical step is to say that these 3 things should stand as the very heartbeat of the Church. Our identity as followers of Christ should flow out from our being rooted in these components. Regardless of building size or budget; number of members or staff; urban vs. rural; here in the U.S. or anywhere else in the world...the thing that unites and connects us and that becomes the source of our identity is how we trust in and rely on God’s will and power; how we are both open to AND how we present opportunities for faith to grow; and how we are intentionally present with each other and with our neighbors in a way that fosters dignity and love. When we pursue those things, we are being the Church. So much of what we are celebrating and launching today is rooted in opportunities to grow those 3 connections.

As I move toward closing, I want to spend 2.7 seconds on the aspect of being present—because it is simultaneously the easiest of the 3, and maybe the most difficult. Presence, from a financial standpoint, costs us nothing; but presence does require an investment of time. While presence is the 3rd component listed this morning, and at first glance may fall short on the importance scale when stacked up next to God’s will and an increase in faith, those two aspects are spurred along when we commit to being intentionally present. God can still move and work in the empty and disorganized, but the preferred example is shown to us in the relational ministry of Christ.

First Pres as a congregation has been pursuing this intentional presence over the last couple of years in several ways. Through things like IMPACT opportunities, VBS, Come & Be Fed dinners and more, the work of showing up has started, and it has been noticed: enrollment in VBS is up, calls we receive from community partners inviting us into their

ministries in new ways are way up. In a world that's divided and hectic and overly busy, simply showing up is increasingly valuable. And there's more that can be done.

That's where today comes into play. Today, next Sunday, and beyond are an invitation to you all to consider the places you feel called to show up at First Pres, to be intentionally present, and to stand ready for opportunities for faith to grow as we strive as a congregation and a Church to be connected to the will of God.

After the Offering time, Dave Tate is going to talk you through this sheet—which will be handed out at that time. This is a list of opportunities open to you to engage in the life and ministry of FPCLY in a ton of different ways! Once the service is over, there will be folks at the tables in the back this week and next ready to talk with you more about these opportunities as you consider where you feel called to engage. The encouragement is that you take the sheet home with you to pray about and consider it, and then to return it—but if you've been feeling a burning desire to jump into an area, then by all means do so today!

The invitation isn't so we have "good numbers"...but because you are valuable, your story and experience matters, and ministry of this congregation and the Church only grows when we are connected and engaged and intentionally present together. The invitation we all receive is to be present because we have experienced and benefited from an intensely present Christ. From that we're called to mirror and share that presence out into the world in a way that fosters wholeness, connection to God's will, and to the growing of faith.

Amen.