

The Healing Touch, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 04080608
Romans 4:13-25 and Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26
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Jesus was a healer, and nowhere could that fact be more apparent than in the Gospel reading for this morning. We hear four healing stories in Matthew. Two of them are obvious: Jesus healed a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years and, regarding the daughter of the leader of the synagogue, Jesus either raised her from death or from a death-like illness.

Healing is the act of restoring wholeness. Physical healing is making the body whole. Healing, or restoring wholeness also involves restoring individuals to spiritual and emotional wholeness. When a rape victim begins to see herself as not responsible for the rape, and begins to see herself as a person of value, she is healing. Healing also involves restoring individuals to each other. Rebuilding community or rebuilding relationships is healing.

We need to understand the depth of division in the church of Jesus' day. To be a proper member of the synagogue, one had to be a strict follower of the rules. The one who was unclean was not allowed into the synagogue and was not to be associated with generally. A woman undergoing her monthly period was unclean. She was not to be associated with. A dead body was unclean, so touching a dead body would make a person unclean. Anyone who broke dietary or social laws was a sinner. Being in the company of a sinner would make a person unclean.

With the understanding of these deep divisions, we can see that Jesus performed two additional significant healings in this passage. The passage begins with the very call of the one after whom the gospel is named, Matthew. Matthew, as a tax collector, was lower than tax collectors in our society are viewed. Tax collectors in the Israel of Jesus' time were hated representatives and lackeys of an occupying government. They were shunned by society.

So, why would Jesus call a tax collector as a disciple? By doing so, he would only hurt his own cause and credibility among the people of his faith. He was guilty by association.

Matthew had no business being a disciple. He was not trained for the job. He was close to being a thief. Tax collectors survived by extracting as much as they could from citizens and had the backing of the military to do so. In the call of Matthew, we gain insight into Jesus' cause. His only cause was healing: healing individuals; healing relationships among individuals; and healing relationships between individuals and God. The very act of calling Matthew to be a disciple was a healing. Jesus restored Matthew to a community—not to the polite and legal community of religious organization, but to the community of God's people.

This act of calling Matthew as a disciple opened up a whole new set of circumstances. The text says, "And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples."¹ Jesus attracted tax collectors and sinners the way a hound dog attracts fleas. He sat down to dinner and they flocked around him. It must have been obvious to the outcasts that Jesus welcomed them. In his presence, they counted as something.

However, sitting down to dinner with tax collectors and sinners was a horror to the religious leaders. That brings us to the fourth healing in this text. The leader of the synagogue walked into that collection of sinners. The Mark version of this story names the leader as Jairus.² Jairus would likely have been an upstanding member of the faith community. He would have been a

¹Matthew 9:10

²Mark 5:22

model of religious behavior and of clean living. He would not have dared associate with tax collectors and sinners. But, Jairus was motivated by the pain of his daughter's illness and the grief of her death. He walked into that motley assemblage of tax collectors and sinners. In the process, healing took place. Jesus healed the division between sinners and the very leader of the synagogue.

In each of these examples of healing, there is a response to Jesus in faith. Matthew left his work immediately upon Jesus' call to him. In the process, he was healed. Jairus moved toward the source of healing that he had heard about. He responded to Jesus in faith. He walked into the dinner of sinners and was healed. Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter, pronounced dead by the professional mourners, responded to Jesus' healing voice. In a tender scene, Jesus, the girl's mother and father, and a few trusted disciples, entered the room in which the dead girl lay. Jesus said, "Little girl get up," and she got up. She responded to Jesus' call, and was healed.

The woman who had been hemorrhaging grabbed on to Jesus' robe and was healed. The Markan version is more dramatic. Jesus was walking, focused on his mission to heal the little girl ahead of him. Behind him, healing took place. The woman with the hemorrhage, hoping against hope, but in an act of faith, reached out and touched Jesus' robe. As we focus on the ministry of healing, other healings take place around us.

In what way do you need to be healed this day? Do you need to be healed physically? I can't promise instantaneous healing, but I can assure that faith in God will put your suffering into perspective. Seeing what others suffer can make your suffering diminish.

Do you need God's help to heal a relationship? Follow Jesus' voice telling you to forgive others. Try looking at the other through the eyes of Christ. Healing between groups of people can happen if some have the courage to walk towards their enemy in understanding.

I said before that Matthew was unworthy to be a disciple. Like Matthew, those of us who are called to be deacons, officers and ministers in the church are all unworthy. We are human and we are not perfect. Yet, the call is from Jesus. We hear that call and have the choice to respond. People do not volunteer to be disciples. Jesus rejects persons who suppose they can become disciples on their own initiative.

In our story from Matthew, Jesus called the rejected. It is an authoritative call: "Follow me!"³
"I . . . call not the righteous, but the sinners."⁴

"Your faith has made you well"⁵

"Little girl, get up!"⁶

In answering the call, we receive healing and wholeness.

³Matt. 9:9

⁴Matt. 9:13

⁵ Matt. 9:22

⁶Mark 5:41