

Advent Lutheran Church
Your Healing Touch
Mark 6:1-13
July 7, 2024

Introduction

All week long, I've been asking one question over and over again: "Who is Jesus?"

I've asked the question in person and online. And, I've received a wide range of replies, including

- Some religious replies: "The image of the invisible God" and "Savior."
- A few relational replies: "My best friend" and "someone I'd like to get to know better."
- Some of the more radical replies: "Jesus is the reason I'm alive today" and "Jesus was first-century Jewish man born into poverty in Roman-controlled Palestine who grew up to become an itinerant rabbi. He challenged the powers that be . . ."

I wonder, who do you say that Jesus is? Does your answer overlap with any of the answers I shared or does it sound quite different?

I won't put you on the spot today, but instead invite you to struggle with this question throughout the summer.

Jesus Priorities

When people ask me who Jesus is, I often begin with a disclaimer that I'm one of his followers. If they care to continue listening, I share that I find he's best understood through what I call the 4 P's: his parables, prayers, proposition, and priorities.

Today, we begin with Jesus' Priorities. This is likely a new term for you. It comes to us by way of a Catholic lay person by the name of Christopher Maricle. A number of years ago when facing a crisis of faith, he turned to the pages of Scripture to try to better understand Jesus.

As he read through the Gospels, he noted everything that Jesus said and did. Then he categorized each occurrence and determined that Jesus prioritized 8 essential habits. Finally, he suggested that if they were this central to the life of Jesus, they should also guide our lives as his followers.

Healing

Jesus' top priority was healing. Miracle located 36 unique healing events or stories that are told 63 times in the Gospels. Jesus devotes a good portion of his earthly ministry to the work of providing healing and wholeness.

Since I just started as your Interim Pastor last week, it's easy to remember that all the Gospel readings have focused on Jesus as a healer. Last week, Jesus raised a girl from the dead and healed a woman who had lived with a health condition for twelve years.

These are just a few of that long list of 36 stories. What others come to mind? Do you have a personal favorite?

Perhaps you are drawn to stories of physical healing, like

- Giving sight to the blind
- Providing hearing to the deaf
- Restoring a withered hand
- Taking away fevers
- Curing leprosy or epilepsy or paralysis

Or maybe you are especially attentive to the kinds of people who were most likely to receive Jesus' healing – the folks who society deemed less than – those who were marginalized, including

- Women and children
- People with mental illness
- Individuals who were economically poor
- Ethnic and religious outsiders
- The disabled and the disenfranchised

Or it could be that you are most moved by how Jesus used healing during his earthly ministry as a sign of the inbreaking of the kingdom of God here on earth.

Gospel

This all sounds good – perhaps too good. Jesus is a healer. The Gospels are filled with episodes of him healing.

Except that things rarely go as we'd expect, like in today's story in the sixth chapter of Mark.

It's a story that reminds us of Jesus' humanity and reconnects us the realities of life in small towns. They are places where everyone knows way too much about everyone else and about each person's family.

These people remembered a much younger Jesus. And they would have been glad to tell you some stories about times they recalled boy Jesus acting a bit too big for his britches.

And, then there were his parents. We may know of Joseph as a hard-working carpenter or builder. His neighbors, however, knew a lot more.

But in this account Joseph gets omitted. In an act of first century condescension or stereotyping, they labeled Jesus as the son of Mary. In effect they are telling us that Jesus came from one of those kinds of families.

Nonetheless, he's back in his hometown doing what he's done everywhere else – teaching, preaching, and healing. The locals are not ready or able to see him in this new way.

Jesus is amazed by their lack of faith. He isn't able to do all of his normal miracles; he's only able to lay hands on a limited number of folks and heal them.

Jesus Invitation

If the story ended here, all would make sense. We know who Jesus is and we get that not everyone can see in him what we do.

However, this isn't where it ends. Instead, Jesus uses this as an opportunity to expand his healing ministry. He informs the disciples that it is their turn. And, he sends them out on what we today might think of as an extended mission trip.

Unlike our modern mission trips that come with detailed packing lists, Jesus starts with what they should leave at home: bread, bag, and money. It was time for the disciples to put on their walking sandals, grab a staff, and get going – two by two.

And, for 2,000 years now, disciples of Jesus have continued to go out in Jesus' name. We've continued to bring God's healing to our communities, to places we travel, and to the entire world.

Our Invitation

This morning I invite you to think about your own healing ministry.

How might you bring healing and wholeness into the world?

A few among us may be called to spend their lives addressing a specific systemic injustice.

All of us, however, are called to live lives marked by compassion.

A number of years ago Karen Armstrong, a former Catholic nun, became something of a household name when she used her TED prize winnings to launch the Charter for Compassion. More than a document, it has become a movement focused on centering compassion in all of life.

The Charter begins with these words:

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.

In other words, compassion is a lifestyle choice. And, it is a choice we have to make again and again to be agents of Christ's healing . . . Perhaps you are up for the challenge.

Interestingly, the original children's version of the Charter concluded by naming this challenge in practical terms:

Make this promise to yourself. Promise to try to show compassion to everyone you see every day . . .

Siblings in Christ, I invite you to put on your walking shoes and grab your staff. It's time to share your healing touch. Amen.