

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Called to Heal, Invited to Travel Light

Mark 6:1-13
April 19, 2026

This week I interrupted my normal routine of posting pictures on social media to ask a question: What do you think Jesus is best known for?¹

I've received a wide range of replies. These included some religious responses: "Savior," "forgiving our trespasses," and "being God incarnate;" some easy to remember responses: "your ticket to heaven" and "the guy in the middle in all those Last Supper paintings;" and even some radical replies: "making good trouble" and "challenging normativity."

I should also disclose that I received a Disciples-centric response: "Jesus is best known for inviting everyone to God's table, no limits or restrictions."²

I wonder, what you think Jesus is best known for. If someone walked up and asked you this question, how would you reply?

While my social media post failed to go viral, I'd like to consider one that did. A week ago today, the American President posted an AI-generated image depicting himself as a Jesus-like figure. More specifically, the President, dressed in a white robe, is placing his hand on the forehead of a man in a hospital gown for what appears to be a healing moment.³

Amidst considerable concern from wide ranging folks including pastors and politicians, the President chose to take the post down. He later explained that he thought the image was of him

¹ I posted this question on Facebook on April 15, 2026, and received more than 30 responses before writing this sermon.

² This reply was submitted by First Christian Church member Gary Dunn.

³ Brad Brooks, Helen Coster and Joseph Ax. "Trump's AI image of himself as Jesus-like figure follows feud with Pope Leo," April 13, 2026, available from www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/trump-posts-ai-image-himself-jesus-like-figure-drawing-outrage-2026-04-13/

as a doctor.⁴ While most outside observers saw a Jesus-like image, the President saw himself as more of a medical healer.

And this brings us to today's Jesus' priority: healing. While I cannot definitively say what Jesus is best known for, I can tell you that the Gospels present him as a healer.

In fact, according to Christopher Maricle, Jesus' top priority was healing. Maricle counts three dozen unique healing events or stories that are told more than sixty times in the Gospels.⁵ No other priority comes close.

Anyone who takes the time to meet Jesus in the Gospels encounters Jesus as one who was devoted to the work of healing and wholeness.

Last Sunday I joined the Faith Keepers Sunday School class as they kicked off their study of the Jesus Priorities. Notably, they started with healing. I'd like to think they did so to help me prepare for this sermon, but I'll confess it also happens to be the first chapter in his book.

As part of the lesson, we looked up a few of the healing stories that appear in more than one Gospel. After hearing them read aloud, folks shared the ways in which they were alike and noted some of the many differences.

Since there are 36 stories, I imagine that you can name a few. When you think of Jesus and healing, what comes to mind? Do you have a personal favorite healing story?

Perhaps you are drawn to stories of physical healing, like giving sight to the blind⁶, providing hearing to the deaf⁷, restoring a

⁴ Natalie Allison. "Trump post appearing to depict him as Jesus removed amid backlash," April 13, 2026, available from www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2026/04/13/trump-jesus-religious-conservatives/

⁵ Christopher Maricle. *The Jesus Priorities: 8 Essential Habits* (Upper Room Books, 2007), p.18.

⁶ See Matthew 9:27-31, Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43, and John 9:1-12.

⁷ See Mark 7:31-37.

withered hand⁸, taking away fevers⁹, or curing leprosy¹⁰ or epilepsy¹¹ or paralysis¹².

Or maybe you are especially attentive to the kinds of people who were most likely to receive Jesus' healing, namely the folks who society deemed less than and who were marginalized, including women and children, people with mental illness, individuals who were economically poor, ethnic and religious outsiders, and 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. In simple acts of healing, Jesus showed the world what heaven looks like.

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

Except that, with Jesus, things rarely go as we expect. This is true in today's story from 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. Maybe some of you know what I'm talking about.

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.

⁸ See Matthew 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, and Luke 6:6-11.

⁹ See Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:29-31, and Luke 4:38-39.

¹⁰ See Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45, and Luke 5:12-16.

¹¹ See Matthew 17:14-20, Mark 9:14-29, and Luke 9:37-43.

¹² See Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, and Luke 5:17-26.

But in this account Joseph gets omitted. In an act of first century omission, 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. He's 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.

If the story ended here, it 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 – including those I mentioned in last week's sermon that came with detailed packing lists – Jesus starts by naming what they should leave at home. The time had come for the disciples to put on their walking sandals, grab their backpacks, 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 families and our communities.

This morning I invite you to think about your own healing ministry . . . How might you bring healing and wholeness into the world?

The author of *The Jesus Priorities* suggests some practical ways disciples of Christ can continue his healing ministry.

First, we can heal through compassion.¹³ A number of years ago Karen Armstrong, a former Catholic nun, became something

¹³ Maricle, p.23-26.

of a household name when she launched the Charter for Compassion. More than a document, it has become a movement focused on centering compassion in all of life.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

In other words, compassion is a lifestyle choice. And, it is a choice we have to make again and again to be agents of Jesus' 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 . . .¹⁶

I can only imagine how much more healing would happen if people truly lived this out. And, as your interim minister, I am grateful to be learning more of your individual stories, including those of how you lead lives of compassion.

While being compassionate is a good start, it isn't the only way we are called to heal.

Second, we heal by saying yes to strangers.¹⁷ In a society that is more familiar with the term "stranger danger" than it is with "saying yes to strangers" this is an invitation to step outside of our comfort zone.

I wonder how it is you move through the world. When you walk down a street here in downtown or when you find yourself in a

¹⁴ For more information about the Charter's history, visit the history page on the organization's website, which is available at charterforcompassion.org/who-we-are/history.html

¹⁵ The full text of the original Charter for Compassion (2009) is available on the organization's website at charterforcompassion.org/sign-the-charter.html

¹⁶ The Children's Charter for Compassion is an organization based in Toronto, Canada, that was founded and created by Erin Henry in 2009. The organization's website contains the latest version of the Children's Charter (2023), available at thechildrenscharterforcompassion.com/childrens_charter_for_compassion

¹⁷ Maricle, p.26-27.

crowded place elsewhere are you so focused on getting to your destination that you don't really see the people you pass?

Saying yes to strangers begins with seeing them. It may move beyond that, but, at times, just the act of seeing someone as another person who is made in the image of God can in and of itself be a healing act. Other times you may choose to engage a person you know you've seen before but never really met. Or it could unfold in any number of ways that result in an unscheduled detour from the day you had planned.

Mother Teresa is widely known for her deep commitment to serving the poor. She also frequently encouraged those who came to serve alongside her to grow in their love for Jesus by discovering Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poor.

What is this all about? It is about treating strangers as we would treat our closest family members.¹⁸

If this all makes sense yet seems a bit overwhelming, then perhaps the next way you can heal will put all of the ways into perspective.

Third, we heal by doing what we can.¹⁹ Healing is about doing your part. It is about doing what its within your power to do.²⁰

No one here is called to be Karen Armstrong or Mother Teresa. No one is being asked to solve all that is wrong in the world.

Each of us is called to follow the healing example of Jesus by doing our part to bring healing to others and to the places where healing is needed most.

As we do this work, we remember that while both our actions and the motivations behind them matter, we do not have control over

¹⁸ Maricle reminds us that "the only real difference between a friend and a stranger is that we are familiar with the former but not the latter" (p.26).

¹⁹ Maricle, p.27-29.

²⁰ Maricle also lists a fourth way we can heal: see with the heart, p.31-33.

how they will be received by others. And, so we do what is within our power to do by choosing to act with compassion and by saying yes to strangers.

Friends, I started by asking what Jesus was best known for. To be honest, I'm okay leaving that unanswered or with agreeing that there are many good answers.

Right now, I'm more interested in what Jesus prioritized. Jesus' top priority was healing and he chose to continue his healing ministry through his disciples. He has chosen you and me to carry on this lifegiving work.

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

Amen.