

## Healing

Luke 17:11-19

When I was in sixth grade, I joined the Boy Scouts. One of the first things I was taught was the proper use of a knife. Until I was taught how to use a knife properly, until I earned my “Toten Chip” card, I wasn’t allowed to use a knife.

I remember the camp out at Sparta Glen. We hiked in off the road, down a few miles into the glen, and set up camp. Our patrol set up our tents on one side of the stream and our fire on the other side of the stream. It wasn’t perfect but it was good enough.

Next morning I was helping prepare our breakfast and used my brand new official regulation Boy Scout knife to cut open the package of bacon. I slipped and nicked my finger.

It was just a small cut but it was on the knuckle, so if the cut was going to heal, we had to find a way to splint my finger. I remember watching the Senior Patrol Leader take a piece of kindling from the pile near the fire, cut off two small pieces, bandage my finger and tape it with adhesive.

*Voila!* Within a matter of minutes I was on the road to healing. My finger healed quickly and you can’t even see a scar. It’s as if it never happened.

I think we often wish more of life was like that. When we’re sick or injured, we hope and pray for healing. **We want a transformation.** We want our health completely restored.

We want our health to be as though we were never sick or hurt in the first place. We want the kind of transformation we see in our scripture lesson today.

If you spend some time in 2 Kings you’ll see the lesson of Naaman, the army commander, who was healed from leprosy when he finally followed the instructions of the prophet Elisha and went to bathe in the River Jordan seven times.

Amusingly, Naaman was initially resistant to this source of healing as he expected a great fanfare or an endurance trial or challenge in order to be healed rather than merely bathing in the Jordan. Yet that wasn’t what was required of him.

When he finally followed Elisha’s instructions, at the urging of the servants, Naaman was made clean. And this was some cleansing. It wasn’t just that Naaman was healed of his leprosy, his flesh was completely restored to what it was before he ever had the disease. He had the skin of a young boy after he bathed. Naaman got exactly what we wish for — complete healing and transformation.

In our lesson today from Luke’s gospel, we get another story of a miraculous healing of lepers. Ten lepers ask Jesus to have mercy on them. Jesus tells them to go, show themselves to the priests, and when they do, “poof,” just like that - they’re healed. The leprosy is gone. Again, just what we wish for when we are the ones who are afflicted.

Now, **a lot of people have a hard time with these miracle healing stories in the Bible.** They find them frustrating at best. Because while the small cuts and bruises of life do heal over, the major experiences of pain and suffering in our lives don’t disappear in an instant.

Even when we are healed, the scars, the after effects of our treatments, the memories of our traumas, remain. For most of us, healing, when it does happen, doesn’t look anything like the lessons we have in this scripture this morning.

And, of course, we can also remember those times when the healing doesn't happen — or it least didn't happen the way we thought it should. Those times when we fervently prayed for a very different outcome than the one we got.

Those are the moments when we question God and even yell at God. When we say “Why do you give us these stories of perfect miraculous healing in our scriptures, but then You don't heal my brother, my mother, my child?”

When we feel that way, we want to rail at God and curse God. And well we should. Life feels completely unfair. And we're in good company being angry at God.

David, the psalmist, was frequently angry at God. Moses got angry at God. The Israelites were angry at God. Author C.S. Lewis got angry at God when his wife died. This tells me that it's okay to *be* angry at God — especially when we experience an outcome far different than what we were hoping for.

What's not helpful, though, is to *stay* angry at God. Because staying angry at God only serves to deepen our own suffering, and it's a sign that we our focus is too narrow.

Yes, there are stories like today's scriptures of miraculous healing that are rarely realized in our own lives. But rarely realized is not the same as never realized.

Miraculous healings do happen. And when we pay attention, we see them. Look at the miracle occurring in our own congregation with Jett Bauman.

When Jett was born prematurely with a heart defect and given less than a 50% chance of survival. And yet Jett is with us today. Currently Jett is in UVA after undergoing a heart pacemaker operation, It's a precarious surgery that is ripe with complications. And yet Jett did well with the surgery and is in recovery today.

I believe that in the years to come Jett will continue to be a present attestation to the miracles that God continues to allow to happen in this world. We just have to keep our mind open for them, and our eyes raised toward the heavens.

Most importantly, we need to remember that not all stories of healing and transformation in the scriptures happen as they did for Naaman in 2 Kings or the lepers in Luke's gospel.

Jacob was injured when he wrestled with the angel and he walked with a limp. The resurrected Jesus still has his wounds. Transformation and healing can happen even when things don't go perfectly, even when things are not brought back to the way they were before.

In fact, it is a central — if not *the* — central tenet of our Christian faith that **God brings new life out of brokenness**. That's exactly what Holy Week and Easter are all about.

The harsh realities of Good Friday are about as broken and painful as one can get. But then comes Easter. Then comes God's affirmation that death, pain, and suffering don't have the last word. Love does has the last word. And new life comes out of the broken and painful moments in our lives.

We Christians are invited to always be on the lookout for how the brokenness of our lives can be transformational.

So I invite you, particularly if you're struggling or have struggled with challenges in your life — if there's brokenness or pain, illness, or injury — to take on a commitment to engage with that brokenness and seek after new ways of understanding it.

To see your brokenness as a source of transformation, as a place out of which to share God's healing love with the world, so that we can live lives that affirm the truth

that is at the heart of our faith: that God's love is stronger than anything and everything in our world — even brokenness, even death.

Come, let's turn our messes into messages of Good News; let's journey together and build up hope in each other, and this world. Amen.