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**March 11, 2018**

**Finding Your Power: Listening for Healing**

Throughout our Lenten journey, we've been invited to quiet the commotion in our lives and listen deeply for God's words, inspiration, and presence. We began by exploring those places – or caves – where we can escape the clamor and focus on God. We spoke of how our very breath connects us to the Holy Spirit inspiration and life giving power of God. Last week, Pastor Christina helped us to look with fresh eyes at our scriptures, God-inspired Words that continue to speak directly into our hearts today.

This morning, we turn our attention to healing prayer, those petitions that we raise to God, for the healing of body, mind, or soul, either for ourselves or others. We'll explore whether we believe prayer makes a difference at all – and in what ways. And what does healing really look like in our lives? As we enter into worship, let us come and rest in God's presence, and lay the fullness of our lives before the one who made us, heals us, and sustains us. Amen.

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**Psalm 22**

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever!

**Mark 5:24-34 (CEB)**

So Jesus went with him. A swarm of people were following Jesus, crowding in on him. A woman was there who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a lot under the care of many doctors, and had spent everything she had without getting any better. In fact, she had gotten worse. Because she had heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his clothes. She was thinking, If I can just touch his clothes, I'll be

healed. Her bleeding stopped immediately, and she sensed in her body that her illness had been healed.

At that very moment, Jesus recognized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

His disciples said to him, "Don't you see the crowd pressing against you? Yet you ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus looked around carefully to see who had done it.

The woman, full of fear and trembling, came forward. Knowing what had happened to her, she fell down in front of Jesus and told him the whole truth. He responded, "Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace, healed from your disease."

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### **Sermon: *Finding Your Power: Listening for Healing***

Our Gospels are full of stories of miraculous healings – times where Jesus simply spoke a word, extended a hand, and brought healing and wholeness to individuals and communities. In fact, there are 41 stories of physical or mental healing – about 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the gospels are devoted to this topic... but in our daily lives, miracles are hard for us to wrap our minds around. We might turn on the TV and see a faith healing service where people are miraculously cured of whatever ails them... but our skeptical minds wonder what happened after the cameras stopped rolling, and what footage was left on the cutting room floor?

In our post-enlightenment, highly scientific society, we wonder if there's any truth to these miracles. And does it really do any good to pray for people's healing? We can't scientifically quantify what is going on when we pray, nor do we always see the results we are praying for... so how do we know what to believe? what to trust in?

I never thought too much about prayer growing up... it was just something you did... I knew it was the "right" thing to do when someone was sick or having surgery, to pray for them, but I didn't really think much about it. That is, until I turned 18 and faced the news that I needed to have a pretty serious surgery. My mom being a pastor, and serving as a district superintendent at the time, spread a prayer request far and wide. More people than I can imagine, all over the world, were holding me, my family and my doctors in prayer. And I couldn't then or now describe **how**, but I *felt* it. I felt surrounded in love, almost like a warm cloud was protecting me from fear. The day of the surgery came, and I knew my parents were so worried, but I had such a sense of calm and peace, that I was reassuring them that everything would be ok. When I woke from the surgery, I discovered that the best possible outcome had been realized, while it would take time to heal from the surgery itself, there would be no further treatment necessary. I, and many others, lifted prayers of thanksgiving – praising God for seeing us through.

Even as I tell that story, and again, say a prayer of thanks for answered prayers, I know that there are many who's stories don't have such happy endings. Many who struggle with debilitating diseases, fight off cancer because their lives depend on it, or face the everyday battles with depression and addictions – people who pray fiercely, and never experience

the miraculous cure they're praying for. Those who hear these healing stories from our gospel and want cry out, "Why not me?"

It is into this reality that we listen closely for God's word of hope. *What is it* that these miraculous stories are meant to teach us about God, about faith healing, and about prayer?

In the story we read today of the woman afflicted with an incurable bleeding condition for 12 years, we hear of one so desperate she will go to any length to find a cure, even sneaking up behind Jesus to steal his healing power. This stealth move makes me wonder if that's how she had learned to operate within a society that deemed her not only sick, but unclean, and thus prohibited from entering the 'holy places.' You know that feeling of disconnect you feel after a few days being home, cooped up with an illness, unable to go out because you don't have the energy, but also because you don't want to spread your germs? Multiply that by 365... and then again by 12! She had learned to operate on the fringes of society and couldn't even bring herself to approach Jesus face to face. But as she touches the hem of his cloak, his energy flows into her, healing her without Jesus' consent or action.

Only the story doesn't end there. Jesus has felt this transfer of healing energy and wants to make a connection. He takes what was simply a physical healing, a curing of what ailed her, and makes it a relational one, restoring her to relationship and community. When Jesus says to the woman, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease," it is an invitation to full restoration. He is inviting her back into the community, giving her something doctor after doctor has failed to do. And so perhaps a deeper healing or sense of wholeness is the point of these stories in the end. Yes, there is a physical cure given, but it's not like that lasts forever. Even those who Jesus miraculously healed, one day died... we all die. Healing is not simply about thwarting death... it's about living in wholeness, abundantly within a community of love and fellowship, healing the places of brokenness of heart, soul, and mind – even if a physical healing, or cure, never comes to pass.

In my years of pastoral ministry, I have seen my fair share of hospital rooms and sick beds... I have prayed more times than I can count for healing – that God's healing power would be poured out, and some do experience physical healing – through the miraculous work of doctors and medicine – which compared to first century medical practices, trust me, are MIRACULOUS! But what I have experienced time and again, is the spiritual healing of prayer... healing the heart, calming the nerves, settling the soul, each which impact the healing of the body. As I pray with those in distress, a sense of peace is almost palpable in the room, shoulders release their pent up tension, and breathing changes from anxious and shallow to deep and cleansing.

Through my own experience when I was 18, and each time I pray with a family or individual, I have been convinced that prayer moves energy. It may not happen in ways we understand scientifically, and it may not follow a straight line from prayER to the one being prayed for, but it does move energy.

Today, when I think of praying for someone, my scientific brain imagines it as a form of quantum entanglement. Like Bells theorem stating that particles across the universe can

touch and impact one another. Like casting a pebble into a pond and waiting for the ripple effects to reach the shore... trusting that the ripples of prayer will benefit someone in a positive way. I imagine prayer as creating a field of energy around the people for whom we pray, that may make a difference, that may be the tipping point in their physical, emotional, or relational healing and wholeness. I believe that prayer can touch and shape us and the environment around us. When we pray for each other, we become entangled with them, and them with us. Perhaps we all become entangled in God as well. Perhaps we're inviting God to come a little closer, to lean in a bit more, to offer comfort, strength, and courage for the days ahead.

This week, I invite you pray for someone who God has placed on your heart, someone who could use your prayers, your positive energy. Hold them in your mind and heart throughout the days, picture them surrounded in the healing presence of God, and reach out to them in some way to let them know you've been praying - visit or call or send a card - some way of connecting with them and sharing your love and prayers with them too. You may never know or see the results of your prayers... but trust that as you send those prayers out into the universe, the ripple effects may just cause a miracle of healing and restoration to occur.

It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit would work in and through us all, that as we call out to God in prayer - prayer for ourselves and for others, that we might more deeply experience God's healing, God's wholeness, whatever that may mean... Amen.