

Through the journey of writing my book, I have been given the blessing of talking to some amazing people. One of these people is my friend Pat Watkins and I want to tell you about him today and how he found healing through answering God’s call.

There I found myself snorkeling in the Chesapeake Bay looking for sea grass. This was not how I envisioned myself being in mission, but I was there because Pat Watkins invited me. In my young adult years, I had some wonderful mentors to look up to and Pat was one of them. Pat was soft-spoken, but when he did speak up everyone listened to his words of wisdom and care.

At a young age Pat felt called by God, but he did not see himself working in the confines of the pulpit. His first missionary trip was to Nigeria, Africa where he learned how to live off the seasons of the land. This type of life really resonated with Pat as he saw that we are created to need the earth and vice versa. Something clicked for Pat while he was at this missionary appointment and he wanted to continue to learn more about how we can live out our faith by taking care of God’s creation. Pat went back to school and learned as much as he could about environmental science.

Pat wanted to move forward in this newfound passion for ministry and mission, but he was uncertain if there was a place like this for him to serve. When there did not seem to be a place for Pat to serve, God made a way. Pat’s passion for taking care of God’s creation was contagious. It became one of our conference initiatives and before his retirement, Pat was serving at a global level as the first missionary to be appointed to care for God’s creation.

Pat found great healing as his friends, colleagues, and churches affirmed his gifts and passions for ministry. He found healing when he felt like he could authentically be himself before God and the church and do what he felt God had called him to do.

Today we continue our third week in “The Healing Ministry of Jesus” sermon series where we are reminded through Scripture that we also are called to support those who are searching for God’s healing.

As we look back to the Old Testament, we see that God used prophets to bring repentance, hope, and healing to the nations. We also find comfort that the very people that God called to serve were, just like us, in need of spiritual healing.

The prophet Isaiah shows us that it is normal to wrestle with ourselves as we are invited to participate in God’s healing ministry in the world. In Isaiah 6 we find the call story of the prophet Isaiah. First, Isaiah had an amazing vision of God. What a gift! Isaiah’s vision is how many of us think about God today. God is almighty; God is too big for us to even fathom or imagine. God is mysterious, and we will never be able to fully realize the greatness and majesty of God.

I often wonder, how Isaiah felt when he experienced this vision. Was he scared? Was he excited? Could he even contain himself? These are the very same feelings so many people have when God is calling them to serve. This vision shows us that Isaiah desired to be in the presence of God.

We also have this desire. To feel that God is with us, yet, like Isaiah, many times we do not feel worthy. Isaiah’s excuse was that he was sinful and therefore was not fit for service to God. Like Isaiah we also make excuses for why we feel unfit to serve God. Like Isaiah we also need to be cleansed by God so that we can move forward into answering God’s calling upon our lives.

As a response to Isaiah’s excuse, God orchestrated a cleansing for Isaiah. As the Harper Collins Study Bible puts it: When Isaiah is “cleansed by the burning coal from the altar, Isaiah may now speak for God.”<sup>1</sup> This moment for Isaiah reminds us that when we are called by God, we too are called to interpret God’s Word to others.

To answer God’s call to serve, we too must be cleansed by God—set apart so we can help others experience God. We first take part in God’s cleansing by acknowledging who we are. We are sinners in need of God’s grace. When we claim who we are in light of our relationship with Jesus Christ, God takes the identity created for us by ourselves and the world and refashions our identity into the image that God has created within us.

So how can we be cleansed? In one word: surrender. We surrender our lives to God. We name and repent of our sins, and God cleanses our souls and helps refocus our minds and hearts on the will of God. This is not a one time-event. In fact, we are called to surrender our lives to God every day. In the moment Isaiah’s lips were cleansed so was his soul. After this moment, his word testified to the words of God and not his own.

It has always been interesting to me that at no time does Isaiah say: “Wait a minute seraph, please do not put that hot coal on my lips. Is there another way we can do this purifying ritual?” Without any protest from Isaiah the seraph touches his lips with the live coal, and he is cleaned of his sin. Since this was a vision, we hope that Isaiah was not burned from this encounter. Instead through this encounter with God, he found the confidence to answer God’s call.

I am glad that baptism is our symbolic cleansing ritual. No more hot coals! Through the waters of baptism and words of repentance, God cleanses our sins. Through the liturgy of Holy Communion, we corporately confess our sins to God, repent, and receive God’s grace. Repentance is not a one-time act; it is something that happens in our lives repeatedly because we are human. This is what Isaiah was talking about. How could he serve a perfect God when he knew he was not perfect? How could God cleanse him when he knew he was going to get dirty again?

Instead of being our own biggest critic, we need to become our own biggest fan. Why? Because we are made in the image of God and that statement in itself (thank you Genesis 2) shows us that we already have worth because of who God is. We have, as United Methodist like to say “sacred worth”<sup>2</sup> and yet we also must own that we are sinners. We can do this by reading this scripture from Romans 3:22b-25a: “For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.”

It is true we are sinners. We make mistakes, but we are still called to serve God through Christ who makes us righteous through our faith. So, we can think of ourselves highly not out of arrogance or pride, but because of God who knows what we are capable of even when we do not.

When we have confidence in what God is calling us to do, we can help others experience the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. Commentary tells us that the paralyzed man was healed “in response to the faith shown by his friends.”<sup>3</sup> I often wonder if the man even wanted to be there that day, or had he given up hope on being healed. I wonder if he told his friends to leave him alone. But we see that somehow they convinced him to go and see Jesus. Somehow, they knew that Jesus would heal their friend.

Through this Gospel lesson from Mark two we see four friends who were determined to help their friend experience Christ’s healing. When they got to Peter’s house there were so many people there that they could not go inside. In his book “The Healing Stories of Jesus” Louis Grams sets the scene for us: “It is a crowd of people hungry to hear more of what Jesus has to say, people waiting to see he will heal anyone, people who are merely curious, and people waiting to trap him in some statement that would show him to be a fraud. It is not an easy audience.”<sup>4</sup>

The friends of the paralyzed man are not bothered by the crowd, but they need to find another way in. According to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “a roof was typically made of a straw and mud mixture. This would have consisted of timbers, covered with brush or similar thatching, and topped with mud and straw.”<sup>5</sup> Also houses were one story so they could have climbed the house by hoisting one another up. No tools were required to make a hole. All the friends had to do was to take their hands and pick away at the clay and thatch until it gave way.

I am sure though that this was not an easy task. First two of them had to get hoisted to the roof. The other two had to lift the man who was on a pallet into the air and hand him off to the men on the roof. Then the other two had to climb up to the roof and make a whole large enough to hoist the man down. The hole had to be at least six feet wide by four feet for the man to fit.

I wonder what the people inside were thinking. Did a storm come up without them realizing it? Was it an earthquake? I think many of them were moved as they saw the man being lowered down to Christ and the determination of his friends. What is beautiful about this Scripture is that the man’s friends never give up on him. Their faith in Christ makes the man well.

The paralyzed man experienced a miracle that day. He was healed and he could walk again. Just as Jesus said to the man at the pool in our Scripture from last Sunday, he tells this man to: “Stand up take his mat and go home” (Mark 2:11). I always wonder what this man and his friends talked about on the way home.

I would like to think that this man took the time to sincerely thank his friends for helping him. I also think that his friends realized that this action was not the only action they were called to take on behalf of their friend. I think they found encouragement to continue to tell people about the healing ministry of Jesus so that they, too, would be healed.

This is God’s call on our lives today. That we, like Isaiah, and like the man’s friends share about God’s ministry in the world. We are called to help our friends, especially when they are experiencing sickness in mind, body or spirit.

When I was sick this past year with some new symptoms, I shared my fears with my friend Ansley. I thought maybe I was going through something normal, but Ansley alerted me to the fact that my symptoms were not normal, and I needed to get checked out. Had I not had that conversation with my friend Ansley I may have waited to be treated and in the waiting, I may have developed breast cancer.

Through that conversation with Ansley I was able to experience healing. I believe that our responsibility to one another is to encourage our friends to seek healing from doctors who can be instruments of Christ healing ministry in the world.

We are charged to care for one another and to have faith when our friends are not able to. **The good news for our lives today is that God has given us the body of Christ so that we will continue to experience Christ’s healing ministry.**

Who is someone that you can check on this week? How can you embody your faith that Christ is healer? I encourage you to share with your friends about your trust in God. Offer to go with them to a treatment or pray for them before they go into surgery and send cards as they are recovering. There is still a lot we can do to participate in Christ’s healing ministry in the world. May we not be afraid to act when we are called to action. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> *The Harper Collins Study Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. HarperCollins. 1993. New York: New York. P 1022.

<sup>2</sup> “The United Methodist Social Principles.” Online: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-nurturing-community#human-sexuality>.

<sup>3</sup> Keck et al. *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*. Vol. VII. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2015. P. 414.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Grams. “The Healing Ministry of Jesus: Signs of the New Creation.” *The World Among Us Press*: Frederick, Maryland, 2016. P. 44.

<sup>5</sup> <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/370/what-was-the-roof-likely-made-of-in-mark-24>