

When I served at my last appointment, I had the pleasure of starting a new worship service called “The Table.” Like the early church in Acts two, each week we would gather around the table for fellowship, sharing, reading the Bible and communion. It was a very special service which I felt gave me more time to meet each person there versus only seeing them for a brief goodbye after the large worship service.

Every week there was a man who came named Paul. What was interesting is that he never came up for communion. I always thought maybe he came from a different tradition and was not used to taking communion by intinction. But one Thursday evening Paul arrived early to worship. He wanted to talk.

I asked him: “Hey, why don’t you ever come up to get communion?” He looked at me with tears in his eyes and said: “I don’t feel worthy. I thought everything had to be going right in my life before I could come to the table and I am not there yet.

What I thought was a denominational difference went so much deeper. Then I had the joy to explain to Paul that we are all welcome to the communion table because Christ is the host. That at the table we are all equal, that we are all sinners in need of God’s grace. That at the table we are complex and blessed, broken and beautiful.

It took a couple weeks, but eventually Paul came to receive communion. It meant so much to him. It was also beautiful to see the way he opened himself up to the rest of the people at the service after that time and how they embraced him with open arms. Something had changed within him, and he was ready to open himself up to God and the body of Christ.

Even during this hard season, I have been blessed to extend the communion table to the homes of so many people. This week it was extended to Lilian, and Aline, to Helen and Shirley. In the eyes of God, we are all equal as children of God, but sometimes, we like Paul do not feel worthy of God’s love or call upon our lives.

We see at the burning bush moment; Moses did not feel worthy to accept God’s calling upon his life. Moses had a checkered past and he could not believe that God would call him to serve. Yet we see that no matter our past, God calls us to serve anyway, and God sustains us to make this happen.

As we continue in our fourth week of the “Healing Stories of Jesus” sermon series, we see that God also calls us to participate in God’s saving action in the world.

Moses had been chosen by God to be an agent of salvation for God’s people: the Israelites. When Moses was a baby, he experienced God’s saving action on his life.

To spare his life, Moses’ mother planned with his sister, Miriam. Since all Hebrew male babies were being killed at that time due to Pharaoh’s command, Moses’ mother put him in a basket and placed him in the safety of the reeds where he could be found. Miriam stood nearby as she saw Pharaoh’s daughter find Moses. Then they struck a deal. Miriam would find a Hebrew woman to nurse Moses until he was old enough to go to the palace to be her son.

Even though Moses was raised as an Egyptian and spent his youth in the palace living the life of a privileged Egyptian, he never lost a heart for his people. One day when he saw a Hebrew getting beaten by an Egyptian, he snapped and murdered that Egyptian. Knowing things could never go back to the way they were before, Moses fled to Midian.

There he made a new life for himself. Through a burning bush God called Moses to go back to Egypt to be an agent of salvation for his people. But Moses did not feel worthy. He said: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”¹ We also ask this question: “Who I am that God would call me to serve?”

Like Moses we may sometimes feel unworthy to serve alongside God. We think well maybe when my faith is stronger, I will try something new. Or maybe when I have a little more time, I will do the thing I have always felt called to do. Or maybe, like Moses, we are simply unable to move forward from the past.

Sometimes we may feel that we are disqualified from answering God’s call because of our past. We may feel guilty about things we have done or said and feel that because of these mistakes we have made, we are not fit to serve God in a new way. We wrestle with ourselves over the past, but the danger in wrestling with ourselves in this way is that we get stuck in the past and are unable to see God’s present and future for our lives.

We all have a past. We all have things we look back on and wish we could do differently. It is okay to wrestle with yourself through these events if we learn from them and take what we have learned about ourselves so that we can honor God with our lives. Remember God called people who had a past. Jacob was a manipulator, Moses was a murderer, David was an adulterer, the Apostle Paul was a conspirer, Peter was a traitor, and yet through their faith in God they found redemption and a place to serve God. Through repentance and trust in God they were cleansed of their sins and continued to serve God.

Moses may have thought his past disqualified him from this mighty task. But God reminded him that God would do the heavy lifting. Moses faithfully served God with his life and participated in God’s salvation for the Israelites. My hope is that he finally had the realization that he was worthy to serve not because of his own merits, but because of the God he was serving.

Our healing story from the gospel of Luke is one that we do not hear very often. Here we see a Roman centurion ask Jesus to heal his servant who was gravely ill. Centurions were “the backbone of the Roman army” and “commanded at least 100 men in a Roman legion of 6,000.”² At that time Capernaum was under the oppression of the Roman military. Most Jews severely disliked this military presence, but we see that this man is different.

This centurion is held in great esteem by his community. In his book, “The Healing Stories of Jesus,” Louis Grams tells us: “He is a good man. He had done nothing but show respect and care for the people who live there. He has even built the synagogue where Jesus often teaches.”³ Even with these good works, we see that the centurion did not feel worthy to receive healing.

He said: “Lord do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.”⁴ The centurion knew that Jesus would not be able to come to his house because it was ritually unclean.⁵ What is amazing about the centurion was his faith.

He believed that Jesus could heal his servant simply by uttering words of healing. Unlike other healing stories in the Bible where we see Jesus’s touch heal others, we see in this Scripture that the servant was healed when Jesus said to the crowd: “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”⁶

It was the faith of this centurion and the power of Jesus that saved the life of his servant. What is interesting is that we see that kind of faith in another centurion at the crucifixion of Jesus. While many there doubted that Jesus was the son of God, we see that after his death this centurion said: “Surely this was the Son of God.”⁷ Ultimately it is our faith in Jesus Christ that saves us and makes it possible for us to experience Christ’s healing and salvation.

Grams reminds us: “When it comes to healing, there is no qualification list for who might be healed. That means that you and I are ‘eligible’ to be healed, and so is anyone that we might come across who needs healing. We don’t need to go through a ‘worthiness checklist’ to see whether it is acceptable to pray with that person. And we don’t need to go through such a checklist for ourselves.

If the worry is about your own worthiness, admit that you are a sinner—you are on the same footing as all the rest of us!”⁸

Even when we may not feel worthy of healing for whatever reason we must remember through this Scripture that healing is available to all who call on the name of Jesus and have faith.

Grams encourages us when he says: “There is an antidote for feeling unworthy: humility. Yes, you may be unworthy by all kinds of standards that you can construct for yourself, but by the standard of the living God, worthiness does not enter the picture.”⁹ So instead of focusing our time and energy on feeling unworthy, we are called to call upon the name of Jesus for ourselves and others when we are in need of healing.

The good news for our lives is that Jesus hears us and responds.

Recently, I had the blessing to catch up with one of my friends, Angie Williams and hear about God’s healing in her life.

I met Angie when I was a young adult. At that time, she worked for the Virginia Conference as the Director of Ministries with Young People. Angie was a young adult herself. She was passionate, warm, and genuinely cared about building relationships with as many people as she could. She especially felt called to help vulnerable children.

She ended up adopting two girls who were in foster care from the same biological family. As Angie took on this new role as mother, she found God had placed a new call on her life. After her oldest daughter graduated and moved out Angie really wrestled with God. She was heartbroken that her daughter was struggling so much with her past and not even Angie’s love could heal her pain. She prayed for healing for herself and her daughter.

During a drive to see her daughter she felt God speak to her and give her a vision in what Angie called her “burning bush” moment. Angie said: “During that drive which I will never ever forget as long as I live, I felt God speak to me in my spirit and give me a vision that I would become part of a movement and a future solution for kids like mine whose families were experiencing economic and relational poverty.”

Through her love for her daughters Angie was called to go in a new direction. Again, Angie wrestled with God. She knew what God had called her to do but grew impatient in waiting for this moment to be realized.

Then on a work trip to Michigan three years later, Angie had another “burning bush” moment. At a conference on “Open Table” Angie’s call was affirmed again. She said: “I knew this was what I had been searching for...I knew it was the answer to change the trajectory of kids like my own...I knew this was the movement to which God had called me to address economic and relational poverty.”

Instead of lamenting that she could not start working for this organization immediately, Angie started a “table” with the support of her local church. There she met another young woman who had aged out of the foster-care system. Angie poured herself out to this young woman and was blessed through the relationship that they created together. She now considers this young woman to be like a third daughter to her.

Angie is now the Managing Director of Open Table where she works tirelessly every day to seek justice for children who are the most at risk. Angie believes that serving in this role is the deepest, most authentic way for her to live out her discipleship, and “the clearest path to human reconciliation that [she has] ever experienced.”

Through answering God’s call upon her life Angie experienced healing and has been an agent of healing and salvation to many others. May we also be open to go where God is calling us to serve, and may we also call upon the name of Jesus that we, too, may be healed. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

¹ Exodus 3:11. NRSV.

² Louis Grams. “The Healing Stories of Jesus: Signs of God’s Creation.” The Word Among Us Press: Frederick, Maryland. 2016. P. 64.

³ Grams. P. 59.

⁴ Luke 7:6-7.

⁵ Louis Grams. P. 59.

⁶ Luke 7:9. NRSV.

⁷ Matthew 27:54. NRSV.

⁸ Grams. P. 61.

⁹ Grams. P. 62.