

In seminary I met a girl named Katie. She had a gnarly scar on her arm and I knew she had a story to tell about it. Soon we became friends and Katie shared with me how she got that scar. One summer while working at a camp, she had a major accident on a ropes course in which she fell 60 feet and sustained life-threatening injuries. Everything had been going so well for her up until this point and this accident made her question God’s presence in her life. She prayed for healing, but she found that her recovery was slow.

She was lucky to survive that accident and ended up spending her nineteenth birthday recovering at a nursery home. Eventually Katie got better and decided to attend seminary at Duke as she further pursued God’s call on her life. One day while in class she started exhibiting some strange symptoms. A few hours later she learned that she had a brain tumor. Just when Katie thought she could put her health concerns behind her, she was going into the unknown again. There was a lot that was unknown about the tumor, other than it could have been the reason for the epilepsy she suffered from since she was a teen, so it was determined that it needed to be removed. Again, Katie asked God: “Why me?” She wondered if she should give up on her call. Again, Katie prayed for healing.

She clung to God, her faith community, and friends and made it through this difficult time. She recovered from her surgery, graduated seminary on-time, and considers herself a “holy instigator” as she serves as the District Vitality Associate where she helps churches in her district live out God’s calling upon their lives in new and creative ways. It would have been easy for Katie to give up and go another way, but she continued to pray for God’s healing to sustain her.

Maybe you have had an experience like Katie. Maybe you feel like no matter how much you are praying you have not received the healing you are so longing for. Or maybe you have been praying for healing for someone you love, but you have become afraid to continue to pray for healing because you do not know what will happen.

As we continue in the fifth week of our “Healing Stories of Jesus” sermon series we see the disciples also struggled with these feelings. Jesus had commissioned them to participate in healing in the name of Jesus Christ and they had been doing this with success. In our Scripture from Matthew 17 we see that they were unable to heal a boy who had epilepsy.

When the disciples ask Jesus why their attempt at healing did not work on this boy, Jesus responds: “Your faith is too small. If it were only the size of a mustard seed, nothing would be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

This Scripture is reassuring to us in some ways. It reminds us that the disciples were human and they, too, had fears about participating in Christ’s ministry of healing, even though Christ had commanded them to do so. To take part in this ministry with Christ, they first had to let go.

Jesus called them to let go of everything familiar to them and follow him. In fact, the first time Jesus sent them out on their own to heal others he said: “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there” (Luke 9:3-4). In this way, the disciples were not able to take any kind of security blanket with them.

The fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James and John, who were used to taking everything they would need for a trip at sea, traded in their fishing nets for miracle stories. The tax collector, Matthew, traded in his money for the gift of community. Although all the professions of many of the disciples were unknown, they each traded in the familiar for the unknown. They had to leave their baggage, their favorite snacks, and the security of money behind and completely put their trust in Jesus Christ. Above all, Jesus taught the disciples to continue to trust in God and to rely on the Body of Christ. The disciples were sent out together to do this important work. This reminds us that we do not do this holy work alone.

In our humanity we all have limits. This situation with the boy with epilepsy reminded the disciples that they were human, and Jesus was divinely human. They were unable to heal the boy, and Jesus healed him immediately. Yet, we know that Jesus did not give up on the disciples. In the great commission in Matthew 28 we see Jesus tell the disciples to carry on this ministry of healing with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

When we participate in Christ’s healing we do so in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are not the healing agent, God is, but our job is to remind people that God is with them and God is healer of our lives. Although we may share some of the same fears of the disciples, we, too, are called to trust in God.

We are called to continue to pray for healing even when healing does not come. We are called to not give up our faith, even when miracles do not happen on our own timeline.

Like the prophet Jeremiah, it is okay for us to name the times when we feel that healing is not happening. In fact, this is what keeps many people from coming back to church. They may be upset with God, that healing did not occur for their loved one.

When we find ourselves in these seasons of our lives it can be hard to trust in God. But God is working during this time and God continues to offer us healing. We are called to continue to hold onto our faith, even when everything else in the world is telling us to give up.

When I was a pediatric chaplain at UNC Hospital in North Carolina I felt that my faith was tested. I saw a lot of pain and suffering and children who died. I prayed for healing and yet, so often there was death. I remember that as I was getting ready to complete my unit it was my job to train the next chaplain. I took him to a patient that was not doing well. He had gone into a coma due to diabetic ketoacidosis, there seemed to be little hope for him. I prayed for healing, but in my heart, I did not believe it would happen.

I shared with this new bright-eyed chaplain that I didn't think this young boy was going to make it. He was shocked as he had never experienced a child dying. The next day he came to me wide eyed and told me that the boy had woken up and would be okay.

In that moment, the faith and hope of this new chaplain reminded me that we can never give up our faith that healing will occur. That we must always pray for healing even when we are unsure that it will occur in this lifetime.

I am here to tell you that Christ's healing still happens every day. I have seen it. There have been many situations across the five churches I have served where I thought people were going to die or had a serious illness and miraculously, they recovered. I hope that you have experienced this in your life as well.

We are all called to participate in Christ's healing in the world. Through our baptism we are sent out into the world. We, like the disciples, have been called to be agents of healing.

In the moment of the Great Commission Jesus was again calling the disciples to continue to participate in Christ's healing. Before Christ had given them authority to heal in his name, now he was giving them the authority to teach and preach the good news of Jesus Christ.<sup>i</sup>

Like the prophets who had come before them, they were now called to be the mouthpiece of God. They now were being called to baptize and make disciples of Jesus Christ. With each person they would baptize Christ charged them to say: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” In this statement they would remember that their ministry was not about them, but about reminding people that God wanted to be in a relationship with them.

We use these same words: “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” when we pray over people and ask for God’s healing. We use these same words because Christ’s ministry in the world continues. Jesus is not finished with us or our world. And like the disciples, we do not do this ministry alone. Christ continues to lead us forward by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We take heart in the fact that Jesus tasked an imperfect group of people to do this important work. After all Jesus does not commission “angels or perfect believers, but the worshipping and wavering community of disciples.”<sup>ii</sup> Just when you think your imperfection takes you out of the running for healing, think again.

A beautiful model for praying for healing can be found in the book of James 5:13-16 which reads: “Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

A very meaningful way to pray for others is with anointing oil. This can be done by anyone it does not have to be a pastor. You can use olive oil or really any type of cooking oil. Then you make the sign of the cross on a person’s forehead or hand and say: “I anoint you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Then you go on to pray for the specific healing that is needed.

At my first appointment there was a group of four men who participated in this type of healing ministry. When someone in their small group was ill, they would all drop everything they were doing and go and find the person in need of healing.

What was miraculous is that all the people that they prayed for seemed to get better. So, I began calling on them to pray for other people outside of their small group and their ministry continued to spread until they anointed almost everyone in that church.

The beautiful thing that happened through their ministry is that it was mutually beneficial. They blessed the person that they prayed for and they were blessed in the process. This is what happens when we participate in Christ’s healing ministry, we too are blessed.

**The good news for our lives today is that Christ continues to invite us to participate in Christ’s healing ministry, even when we may not feel up to the task.**

The good news is that God’s healing is not up to us, but we are called to always pray for healing no matter the circumstance.

May we not be afraid to pray for healing. May we continue to trust in God and let go of our fear so that we may be a blessing to others. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>i</sup> Leander Keck, et al. *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary Vol. VII* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 376.

<sup>ii</sup> Keck, et al. *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary Vol. VII* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 375.