

I don't think I have ever prayed more for healing than in the past year. Healing from COVID, healing for so many in our church and community who have experienced the death of a loved one or illness, and healing for our nation. We long for healing and wholeness during this season of isolation that continues to go on and on.

In this way, we are no different than so many people in the Bible who had this same longing for healing and wholeness. Throughout the Old Testament book of Exodus, the Israelites longed for healing from oppression. For some they may have accepted this way of life thinking there was no way out, but others longed for the ultimate healing that comes with freedom.

Moses saw his people being oppressed and one day he snapped killing one of the oppressors, an Egyptian. After this happened, Moses realized things would never be the same, he was now a criminal and he was now a stranger to himself and others. He became an outlaw and ran away.

I have to imagine he was in the depths of despair. He had lost everything, his home, his family, and even his own identity as he knew himself before. But God...

But God, through the fire of a burning bush sought him out, claimed him, and called him to experience resurrection.

We usually do not use the word resurrection in the Old Testament, as the ultimate resurrection moment happened when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. And yet, if we look closely throughout the Bible, we see moments where people who thought they were dead, were invited into a new way of life.

This was Moses' resurrection moment. This was his opportunity for healing. He almost missed it. He made excuses about how he could not speak well and was not qualified. God called him anyway, gave him a new identity as prophet and invited him to take part in God's saving action in the world, to save and free the Israelites from the reign of Pharaoh.

Today God is offering to us a moment of resurrection. A moment to claim our grief, name the loss of our lives as we used to know them, and to move forward in hope with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For the next two weeks we will be focusing on Jesus' healing ministry, these glimpses of resurrection in our lives, because we could all use a little more healing and Jesus continues to offer us healing even during this season.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus offers various types of healing to those who are looking for healing and those who are not. Our story from the gospel of Mark shares about a man who was not looking to be healed.

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue with great authority. The people were not used to a modern-day prophet. Sure, they knew about Moses and the prophets after him and how they were the mouthpiece of God. They would know the Scripture from Deuteronomy 18 about how God continued to raise up prophets to do the work of the Lord. But could this be what they were experiencing when Jesus had such authority?

As if this moment was not enough for them to start wondering about him, in walks the man with an unclean spirit. He said: “What do you have to do with us?” (Mark 1:24). Commentary tells us that “the demon speaks for the entire kingdom of evil spirits by using the plural “us.”¹

I have often wondered about this unnamed man in Scripture who was possessed by demons. Although The United Methodist Church recognizes the forces of wickedness and evil in the world, we do not spend a lot of time talking about demons. And yet the way commentary describes a demon is something that perhaps we may have experienced or witnessed; a demon “takes over the personality of their victim...”²

We are all fighting our own battles and sometimes the demons of fear, depression, addiction, illness, or pride consume us and make us unrecognizable to ourselves or others. Just as Moses struggled with his own identity, we too wonder what happened?

At this moment in time, we are struggling with the demon of fear, fear of the unknown, fear of the virus, fear of isolation, fear of not knowing when we will be able to be vaccinated. Fear that we are missing out on the lives we thought we would lead.

Unlike the man with the unclean spirit, these demons that we face are not the result of evil overtaking us, but are the result of us living into the brokenness of our human condition. This is why we still need Christ, the one who continues to offer us redemption and healing.

I wonder what is the thing that you are battling right now? How are you in need of healing or a resurrection moment?

We all need Christ’s healing. On our best day and on our worst day, Christ is the only one who can consistently come into our lives and offer us hope.

Healing begins when we recognize Christ. This doesn’t mean that the things that worry us disappear, as our lay leader Jeff said last week. But this does mean that even in the midst of despair or a difficult season in our lives we are able to acknowledge that Christ is alive and working today.

What is interesting is just like other healing stories in the Bible the demons recognized Christ. They recognized Christ as a threat because the power of Jesus Christ will always defeat the powers of evil and wickedness in the world today. Jesus commanded the unclean spirits to come out of the man and immediately they left him.

In the process the man shook and cried. It is hard to release even the things that hold us back from God, as they become familiar friends in our journey of life. And yet, God continues to offer us healing in mind, body, and spirit.

How are you in need of healing today?

When we recognize Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives and our personal Savior, we can get a glimpse of resurrection and the kingdom of God coming near.

This week I got to experience many resurrection moments. When I saw a colleague, who is going through radiation treatments for cancer, show up at our board meeting to fulfil her leadership role because she is investing in the next generation of pastors, I experienced a moment of resurrection.

When I got to spend time with a colleague in ministry and friend I have known since my youth, I felt that the kingdom of God had come near through encouragement and understanding.

When I called some of you this week to share about Madeline Smoot’s death, I heard your sincere love and care for her and her family. That is a resurrection moment. Anytime that life comes out of moments of death, we are invited to participate in Christ’s ministry in the world.

It is no secret that this pandemic has changed our lives. It has changed the way we worship and has currently stripped us of our ability to be together in person to worship God. But the pandemic cannot take away the joy we have in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The pandemic cannot take away the love we have for one another and the community because that is how we live out our mission as the church. The pandemic cannot take away our ability to recognize that Christ is still at work in our lives.

What kind of healing do you need today? It is bodily healing, are you experiencing physical pain? Is it emotional pain or loneliness? Perhaps it is grief over all the loss we have all been through. Maybe it is spiritual healing, you long to feel the presence of God.

Whatever pain you are experiencing today, know that you are not alone. God is with you. Jesus came to save you and redeem the whole world so that death would never have the last word.

If you find yourself consumed by sadness or despair, don't hesitate to reach out. I don't want anyone to be left behind during this season.

The good news for our lives today is that Christ has already defeated death to save us from our sins, and from our own demons. Christ confronts us on our worst day, not to judge and condemn us, but to offer us forgiveness and grace.

So, what are we waiting for? Instead of waiting to do anything until things go back to normal, the time to act is now. How can we love God now? How can we celebrate the resurrection moments in our lives and name when we feel the kingdom of God is near?

This week I invite you to be intentional about resurrection moments in your life. I invite you to recognize what Christ continues to do in the world through the Holy Spirit. I invite you to name your “demons” the things that are holding you back from believing the promise of hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I invite you to recognize how Christ has already offered your healing in many forms. Whether it was through the encouragement from a friend or family member, whether it was through an answered prayer, whether it was in a moment of stillness or peace before the Lord. Christ continues to offer us healing each and every day. May we recognize Christ's healing in our lives and receive it with joy. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Leander Keck et al. *New Interpreter's Biblical Commentary*. Vol. VII. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2015. P. 407.

² Ibid.