

I don't know about you, but lately I have been marveling over how God has worked in my life. You see I have been more reflective lately as I am writing my book on answering God's call. With each chapter, I am reminded what God has done in my life and in the lives of my friends and colleagues. Most recently, I have celebrated that Susan is here with us as she further discerns her call. I never thought we would be working together, but you never know what God is going to do.

Looking back, the path to answering my call to ministry is clear, but it seemed zig-zagged and curvy to me at the time. This past week I had one of those full circle moments that reminded me that God has continually been at work in my life. Have you ever had a moment like this? This moment was the culmination of 10 years of ministry.

If you know anything about my call story, one profound moment I experienced was a moment of failure. We should not be ashamed of our failures because they teach us important lessons. The first time I was interviewed for ordination I did not pass my theology interview. They said I did not talk enough if you can believe that knowing me. After I got the news that I had to wait another year I was devastated. The next year I passed with flying colors, but that moment of failure has always stuck with me.

Have you had an experience like that in your life that was a defining moment? A moment that made you question yourself or even God?

This full circle moment began when I received a voice mail from my fellow colleague Tammy asking me to call her back. When she answered the phone, she asked me if I would like to be the new chair of the team C theology committee for the board of ordained ministry. And now I chair the very committee that continued me so many years ago.

This was a full circle moment for me because something that started off being a very difficult experience for me is now an invaluable to my new role. You never know how God is going to use your perceived or real failure for God's glory.

I share this story with you today because often we forget that God has a plan and God is in control. We want to follow our own plans and when things go differently than we expect we question God. Our Scripture lessons for today remind us to trust in God always.

In our Scripture from Genesis we see that Abraham was having a full circle moment. You see he had already banished his first son Ishmael, and now God had asked him to sacrifice his other son Isaac. After everything he had been through how could God ask him to do this?

And yet, Abraham trusted in God, who ultimately spared Isaac’s life. In this moment, Abraham understood that his son’s life was never really in peril; a sacrificial lamb who would take his place.ⁱ

Abraham trusted in God and God saved his son Isaac. In this moment, he more clearly understood what it meant to be in a covenantal relationship with God.

Just as Abraham was looking for someone to save Isaac that day, a beggar in the book of Acts was also looking to be saved. Isn’t this what we are longing for? That God would continue to save even us?

In this second week of “Our New Normal” sermon series we continue our way through the book of Acts. We see that Christ’s ministry of salvation is now at work through his disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In our Scripture from the book of Acts we see the first example of how the disciples healed someone in the name of Jesus Christ. There are many layers to this Scripture that are important for us to understand to experience its power.

First, we hear about a beggar who was lame from birth. This beggar never knew what it was like to walk and stand tall. He never knew what it was like to be independent. He always had to rely on others to carry him to the temple gate. Because of his physical disability he was viewed as an outcast and not able to enter the temple gate.ⁱⁱ

So, we find him at the “Beautiful Gate.” Commentary tells us that “It seems ironic that a gate called *beautiful* performed the ugly task of preventing those with the greatest needs from accessing the place that ‘housed God.’ The beautiful gate was the grand entrance to the Court of Women, the general place of public worship during the time of sacrifices.”ⁱⁱⁱ

So, this lame beggar who was unable to participate in the gathered community of God relied on their generosity. The beggar was there that time of day because he knew people would be coming for afternoon prayer.^{iv}

This is where Peter and John enter this scene. They are coming to the temple to pray and they encounter this man who is in need of more than money.

So, Peter does something better for him. In the name of Jesus Christ, he tells the man to “get up.” And an amazing thing happened. He was able to walk.

He was now welcomed into the gathered community and no longer an outcast. That day Peter continued Jesus’ ministry to all people, especially those considered the least of these.

So that does this Scripture speak to us today?

Today we are called to ask ourselves how God is calling us to “get up.”^v

By this I mean how is God calling you to participate in Christ’s healing ministry in the world today?

In this moment, more than ever I want to name that we all may feel more limited than we ever have before. There are certain things that we cannot do right now to keep ourselves and our neighbors safe. But God is still calling us to be part of Christ’s healing ministry in the world.

Perhaps God is saying to you “get up” and trust me. We know that many people all throughout the Bible had a hard time trusting in God and Jesus Christ. In fact, Thomas is famous for it.

What would it look like for us to trust God during this time of pandemic? What would it look like if we let go of the worry caused by the things we cannot control and focused instead of offering Christ’s healing to others?

I don’t think that Peter could have performed the miracle he did that day if he did not fully trust in God.

Trusting in God does not mean that we throw caution to the wind and hope for the best. It does not mean that we don’t follow the CDC guidelines claiming that God will protect us. Trusting in God means knowing deep within your heart that God will continue to care for and be with you.

Maybe God is saying to you “get up” and move forward with your life. I think this is what happened to the lame beggar that day. He had been stuck for his whole life with no new options. After he could walk the whole world opened to him.

Many times, we find that we are stuck due to the way life happens around us. Some of us may feel stuck during this pandemic wondering when it will ever end.

Repeatedly God reminds us that new life is waiting for us if we are willing to leave our old lives behind. It is hard to move forward sometimes because our old lives are comfortable.

When we move forward trusting God, we are able to stand tall into God’s plan for our lives and help others to do the same.

Today God may be calling you to “get up” and help others experience Christ’s healing. Time and time again in the gospels we see that people were able to experience Christ’s healing because their friends made it possible for them to be there for this to occur.

- 1) The man who was paralyzed was lowered through the roof by his friends (Luke 5:17-39). I often wonder if he would have been healed if it were not for the efforts of his friends.
- 2) The man who asked for Jesus to heal a paralyzed man who worked for him (Matthew 8:5-13). Had this man not come to find Jesus that day, his friend may not have found healing.

Then there are the stories in the Bible of Jesus healing those who came to find him by themselves. These are people who trusted in the power of Jesus’ healing. The woman who was bleeding for many years, the leper, the man at the pool of Bethesda who could not get in the pool in time to be healed. Jesus healed all those who asked to be healed themselves or who were brought to him to be healed. This is the amazing God we serve!

And yet, we have been called to be part of Jesus healing ministry in the world. Maybe you find yourself in need of Christ’s healing today. Perhaps you are weary in mind, body, or spirit. Perhaps you are weary because of the pandemic. Whatever it is, Christ’s healing is available to you today as we are all called to trust in God the Great Physician.

So how can we take part in Christ’s healing ministry in the world?

We are called to show up especially for those who are considered the least of these. Those who are unable to help themselves. Those people in our lives who have no one.

I think all of us can name a friend we have who is in need. Someone who is lonely and isolated. Someone who has no support system. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts to identify these people in our lives.

Just like Peter, we offer others healing in the name of Jesus Christ. We are simply God’s instruments of healing and yet this is an important role to play.

This evening I will be attending the “Community Gathering for Peace and Justice” in Woodville, Virginia. I will be showing up in a pastor shirt and stole bearing witness to Christ’s healing ministry in the world to many who have felt less than, unheard, and devalued. This is how God is calling me to “get up” today.

How is God calling you to “get up”? What will you do this week that can offer Christ’s healing ministry in the world?

The good news for our lives today is that God continues to provide for us and offer us healing in the name of Jesus. May we also show up for God and be witnesses of Christ’s healing ministry in the world. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Keck et al. New Interpreter’s Commentary. Vol I. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2015. P. 157.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/book-of-acts-sermon-starters-week-5>

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^{iv} Keck et al. New Interpreter’s Commentary. Vol I. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2015. P. 157.

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