

“Healing Everybody”

Jeremiah 17:5-10, I Corinthians 15:12-20, Luke 6:17-26

The Rev. Dr. Timothy Ahrens
Senior Minister

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From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

A sermon delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, February 13, 2022, Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, dedicated to my wife Susan Sitler whom I love more than anyone in the world, to Henry Wade as our first 2022 Confirmand to be introduced and Grace Glaros for her Valentine’s Day Birthday, and on this Super Bowl 56 Sunday, to Ohio natives, Mike Brown, Joe Burrows, and all in the Cincinnati Bengals organization as they play for a super bowl victory, and always to the glory of God!

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Clarence Jordan begins his book, *The Sermon on the Mount* with these words: “Crowds always moved Jesus. Sometimes he was moved to great compassion by the crowds. At other times, their disbelief aroused his pity. Sometimes their selfishness caused him to wonder if they were following him only for loaves and fishes. Their sickness and illnesses gnawed at his heart. And their lostness and confusion filled him with a desire to show them the way to a true way of life”

(Clarence Jordan, *Sermon on the Mount*, A Koinonia Publication from Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA, fourth printing, 1973, p. 20).

The quote ends there but the thought continues...

One day, as he looked on the crowd, Jesus saw that something was different. They were ordinary people but it wasn't an ordinary crowd. They were all aware that the world was crashing down upon them. They were aware that their lives and their civilization was sick unto death. They had reached the end of their rope. Following the example of John, the Baptizer, they had climbed down into the muddy Jordan River bank into the stream of living water, and there admitted their wrongdoing and failings, they had repented of their sins. They rose refreshed and ready for a new way of life. With the Romans breathing down their neck the stale air of oppression, the crowd turned to face the rabbi of Nazareth – a wonder-worker, a healer, a teacher.

It was on this day that Jesus offered his Healing Presence and his Transformational Word. Luke records this day in the Sixth Chapter of his Gospel. Here Jesus, seeing the crowds and the multitudes before him, knowing the moment is at hand, Does and he Says what needs to be Done and Said. This is very interesting, because in Judaism rabbis are taught that the most important thing to do as a rabbi is “to do.” “To do” what is right and just – and then if you get around to saying something about it, so be it. But “Doings” always precede “Sayings” in Hebrew scripture and tradition.

First, he heals everybody – not one or two with well-known afflictions or easily diagnosed illnesses. He heals everybody. For the child who has struggled with stuttering, Jesus heals him. For the child who has experienced high anxiety with all the pressures of growing

up, Jesus heals her. For the teenager struggling with relationships, Jesus listens and heals her. For the shepherd who has contracted anthrax while caring for his dying sheep, Jesus heals him. For the woman who has been beaten down by life carrying the load of her family for economic and familial survival, Jesus heals her.

If you come to Jesus with any condition of mental illness, he heals you. If you come to him with a pain in your neck or an ache in your side, he heals you. If you come with a broken leg, a broken heart, a broken moral code, he heals you. If you come with a finger out of joint or an attitude that needs major readjustment, he heals you. If you come with cancer or heart disease, he heals you. He is a therapist, a chiropractor, a general practitioner, a surgeon, and a rabbi all rolled into one. It might be impossible for us to believe, but the text here is clear – he heals everyone. And this not the only place in scripture where Jesus heals everyone. It happens seven times across the Gospels.

I can imagine that Jesus was with the crowds that day for hours and hours before he delivered his four blessings and four woes. I can see the blind man reaching for him. I can see the child with finger in need of a healing kiss, coming to his knee. I can see the tormented and not so tormented needing to know that someone will receive them, someone will listen to them and someone will care for them in their pain.

Jesus treats the whole person because he loves the whole person. He knows people are complex and he treats people for the complex beings that we are. He loves us for our quirks and ticks. He loves us for our phobias and idiosyncrasies. He loves us in spite of the fact that we talk too much – or too little. He loves our conscious and

unconscious being. In the midst of everything about us, he believes that there are spiritual powers at play in our lives and in the universe that affect us spiritually and physically and psychologically. He takes us seriously and he is serious about all our needs and healing all of us.

Through the years, I have seen time and time again, people will tell and retell their stories of struggle until they feel like someone has heard them. They will come back to the doctor or the pastor with aches and pains – both of the body and the mind – that pills might not help. They just want to know that their doctor or their pastor is listening to them. I can't speak for doctors, but I can speak for myself. There have been times I have listened carefully and been part of the healing process. There have also been times when I have not listened carefully and thus prolonged the pain. Jesus is unrelenting in his healing presence. He never gives in and never gives up. He heals everybody.

There is something else you need to know... Once he has healed everyone only then does he begin teaching. And his teaching in the Gospel of Luke is really interesting. He uses only 166 words (give or take a few based on the translation you are using). He must have been worn out from healing everybody. He had stepped into their pain and received it all before letting it go to God.

He only had a few words left in him. While his healing of the disciples and the multitudes must have been prodigious, his words are simple but powerful bombshells. They were spoken to people who had just been healed. They were listening carefully to the man who lifted the world's burdens from their lives. He blessed the poor and brought woe to the rich. The people whom Jesus called happy; the world was busy calling wretched – the wretched of the earth.

He turned the world upside down. But he does it in an interesting way. To the rich he declares, it is the material values that you cherish, now you have everything you need. It is over. It's done. I can't do anything more for you. He doesn't damn someone for that wealth, he points they lose something for not having what's more to gain in this world – the fullness of life.

However, if you set your heart and bend all your energy to be loyal to God, you will find true fulfillment and happiness. It is a joy of eternal value. With his 166 words, he wants people to know what will make them happy and what will bring them down. The poor will be satisfied. The hungry will be filled. Those who weep will be comforted. And if, by chance, you are hated, insulted and shut off by others who seek to do you harm, you will be rewarded with riches in heaven – just like the prophets who came before you. However, if you are rich now, filled up now, laughing now or being exalted by people now – who are really exalting false prophets – the tables will turn.

In the words of *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, “there is trouble ahead.” He writes of Luke 6:24-27:

But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made.

What you have is all you'll ever get.

²⁵ *And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself.*

Your self will not satisfy you for long.

And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games.

There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it.

²⁶ *“There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth*

contests—look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular (Eugene Peterson, *The Message*).

To follow Jesus is a true blessing. But it is not a blessing with life choices and consequences. I love the words of FR Maltby, “Jesus promised his disciples three things – they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble.” One of Christianity’s great blessings himself, G. K. Chesterton, whose own principles got him in plenty of trouble, wrote: “I like getting into hot water. It keeps you clean!” Or as the late Congressman John Lewis would tell us, “If you get into trouble, get into Good Trouble.”

In the end, the consequence of Jesus’ healing everyone is that everyone is clear enough and cleansed enough to make good choices of the way to live and be in this world. It is a wonderful consequence to have!

In the end, you and I can’t ask for lives free of problems. We can’t ask God to make us and those we love immune to disease. We can’t ask God to weave a magic spell around us so that bad things never touch our lives or come our way. But we can ask God for courage and for strength to bear the unbearable. We can ask God for the grace to remember the blessings of this life and those who blessed us and have gone before us. We can ask God to help us discover more strength and more courage than we ever knew ourselves to have.

We cannot escape suffering, but we can find God in spite of it and even within it.

This day, may we all pray to Jesus for healing. May we trust Jesus to heal us. And may we ask God to teach us to be strong enough to find a moment in this day when our heart is light enough to let us smile.

May we ask God – even in affliction – for the grace of God’s loving spirit which allows us to feel God’s blessing today and rest in such a way that tonight that we will rise filled with a blessing for tomorrow. Amen.