

**Series: The Words of Jesus—On Healing (Lenten Series)**

**Today: The Authority to Heal**

**Text: John 4:46-54**

**A Sermon preached by The Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.  
Sunday, March 1, 2009 (First Sunday in Lent)  
First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA**

This morning we are continuing our yearlong series on the Words of Jesus, and during Lent we are going to be focusing on Words of Jesus related to Healing. You may recall that four years ago we focused on the Healing Ministry of Jesus, and from that series we have experienced the birth of a new ministry. Today, and every Communion Sunday you may come forward and have people who have the gift of prayer and healing lay their hands upon you, anoint you with oil and pray for healing in your body, mind or spirit. For the next five Wednesdays during this season of Lent, Healing Prayer will be an integral part of Lenten discipline during our midweek communion services.

Healing Prayer has become a part of our life as a congregation, and we have had some amazing experiences which tell us that it is here to stay; but some here aren't so sure. I mean, after all, we are Presbyterians. Isn't the ministry of healing something that "holy rollers" do? It seems so undignified; so *Catholic!*

Maybe you have heard of the Presbyterian preacher and his wife who decided to get a new dog. Ever mindful of the congregation, they knew the dog must also be a Presbyterian. They visited kennel after kennel and explained their needs. Finally, they found a kennel whose owner assured them he had just the dog they wanted.

The owner brought the dog to meet the pastor and his wife. *'Fetch the Bible,'* he commanded. The dog bounded to the bookshelf, scrutinized the books, located the Bible, and brought it to the owner.

*'Now find Psalm 23,'* he commanded. The dog dropped the Bible to the floor, and showing marvelous dexterity with his paws, leafed through, and finding the correct passage, pointed to it with his paw.

The pastor and his wife were very impressed and purchased the dog. That evening, a group of church members came to visit. The pastor and his wife began to show off the dog, having him locate several Bible verses. The visitors were very impressed. One man asked, *'Can he do regular dog tricks, too?' 'I haven't tried yet,'* the pastor replied. He pointed his finger at the dog. *'HEEL!'* the pastor commanded. The dog immediately jumped on a chair, placed one paw on the pastor's forehead and began to howl. The pastor looked at his wife in shock and said, *'Good Lord, Martha, he's a Pentecostal!'*

If you happen to be one of those who is uncomfortable with the healing ministry; if you think it is only for Pentecostals or Roman Catholics, I hope that by the time we finish this series you will see that the faith practice of prayers for healing can be something which can enrich our lives as a congregation and be of enormous benefit to the individuals for whom we pray. This morning we want to focus on one of the healing miracles which took place early in the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of John and think on the Authority to Heal.

Our story takes place in the village of Cana in Galilee. This is not the first time we have been here. When Jesus began his ministry, one of His first public miracles took place at a wedding in Cana. You will recall that, as was the custom, the wedding celebration went on for several days, and they were running out of wine. Mary, the mother of Jesus, came to him and asked if he could help, and he not only changed six

stone jars (standing about waist tall) filled with water into wine; the finest wine imaginable. Miracles in Cana were not commonplace, but it seems to be a favorite place for Jesus to make the point that he is different; his ministry is different; and his authority is different from anyone else. This morning I would like to focus on his authority to heal from two different perspectives: 1) The Authority of Jesus and 2) The Faith of the Nobleman.

### **The Authority of Jesus**

A royal official from King Herod's court comes to him begging for him to heal his son. He has walked from Capernaum to Cana, a distance of about 20 miles. When he left, his son was near death, and he had heard about the power of Jesus. So he makes the trip to Cana and begs him to heal his son.

Jesus speaks a word of healing, and it is done. He does not equivocate. He speaks with authority. He acts with the power of the Almighty. His word of healing is sufficient. The boy lives. This is the power and the authority which Jesus offers when it comes to healing. His word is sufficient to the task. He can heal, and he does heal—sometimes by using modern medicine and sometimes simply allowing the body to do what it is designed to do—to heal itself.

It is amazing to me that most of us believe this in the most fundamental way when we are sick. When our Pastoral Care Team visits in the hospital, we always offer to pray, and it is a rare occasion that we are turned away. Most people who are sick acknowledge that there is more to healing than modern medical science can offer. Most medical personnel will acknowledge that the best they can hope for is to create the environment where the body can heal itself; sometimes through surgery; sometimes through medical

interventions. We thank God for the advances in modern medicine, but with all of the advances the mystery of the body being created to heal itself is still a gift from God, and any of us who have needed help from medicine know that, don't we?

Many of us in this church bear witness to this authority of Christ to heal in our lives. My family would be one of those who had seen the authority of Christ to heal over and over again in the last five years.

In October, 2003, our daughter's kidneys failed, and we were told there was nothing medicine could do to bring them back to life again. She needed a kidney transplant, and all the best modern medicine could do was to put her on the transplant list. The average wait to receive a kidney transplant was 3-5 years; a time period where the person awaiting the transplant can have any number of complications. Most often their bodies just get weaker so that if the transplant arrives in time, they are in a compromised position to have the transplant be successful.

However, it was the power of Christ to bring healing through a community of prayer which surrounded her with love and prayed fervently for a donor that led a woman in that community to come to Philadelphia a year to the day that she was placed on dialysis to donate her own kidney; the kidney which has kept our daughter alive for the last five years. We needed medical science to transplant the kidney, but medical science knew it needed the power of Christ to heal in order to have a kidney to transplant.

### **The Faith of the Nobleman**

So the authority of Christ to heal is a two way street. Jesus claims the authority, but the Nobleman also trusts the authority. He has faith in the word of Jesus. He doesn't question how it can be. He simply believes, and his faith is enough.

The next day, when the Nobleman hears that his son who was near death has come out of his coma, he asks what time he had awakened. He recognizes that the healing took place at the very hour he believed in the authority of Jesus to heal.

The writer to the Hebrews says that faith is the substance of things hoped for; placing our trust in unseen realities (Hebrews 11:1-2). The Nobleman was willing to place his trust in the unseen reality of the power of Christ to heal, and his son was healed.

Mark Batterson is the pastor of National Community Church in Washington, D.C. which is a postmodern community attempting to witness to the grace of God in some pretty exciting ways. In his book, Wild Goose Chase, he makes the point that sometimes the signs of God's grace can only follow our decisions to believe in spite of the evidence. *The way you overcome spiritual inertia and produce spiritual momentum is by making tough decisions. And the tougher the decision, the more potential momentum it will produce. The primary reason most of us don't see God moving is simply because we aren't moving. If you want to see God move, you need to make a move!*

Batterson uses the example of his church who had been praying for a drummer to join their worship team for months. However, he came to believe that God was waiting for the church to make the first move. So he went out and bought a drum set and the very next Sunday a man who played in the Marine Corps Drum and Bugle Corps showed up and asked if he could help. (Source: Mark Batterson, Wild Goose Chase (Multnomah, 2008), pp. 32-33) Sometimes we have to make the first move before God can unleash his healing power in our bodies.

As I look out this morning, I see a man who three years ago was in the hospital recovering from a stroke. He was uncertain if he would ever be able to do any of what he

did before his stroke, and he was discouraged. I told him about the way I prayed for people like him; how I get an image in my head of what I would like for an individual or a situation, and I surrender that image to God.

My image for this man was that he would be in church on Easter Sunday singing *Jesus Christ is Risen Today*. He has since told me that he thought that was an impossible goal, but he is a goal setting kind of guy, so he humored me. God honored his commitment, and on Easter, 2006, he was in the pew where he usually sits with tears streaming down his cheeks as he sang his Easter faith. He had to make the first step, and God honored his faith. Sometimes we have to show God that we are ready before God is able and willing to move to help us.

### **Conclusion and Invitation**

Jesus claimed the authority to heal, the Nobleman believed in that authority, and the healing power of God was revealed. This is what we bring to this table as we begin our journey to Easter on this first Sunday in Lent. We believe that Christ still has the authority to heal through his sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, and the choice is still in our hands if we will believe in that authority so that we may find healing for ourselves and for those we love.