

Hey, it's great to be back at church. It's a relief to be standing up here and not have to be managing multiple screens and videos and songs all on my own.

I love the fact that in church we are a team, we have people who can lead the singing, and other people who can manage the sound and others who can manage the data and video. Next we will be building a team who understand livestreaming. In a team we teach other how to do what we do.

And that's exactly what Jesus did, he taught the disciples to be able to do all that he could do by the Spirit. Jesus said, *Truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.* John 14. 12.

Our Scripture today is about Peter and John supernaturally healing a lame man. It's a great story. A man is healed. He jumps around and goes into the temple to worship. He no longer needs to beg for his livelihood. There are lots of blessings in the story. But here's the one I want to pick up today. By God's Spirit Peter was able to do the same thing that Jesus did. And so can you; Jesus wants to teach all of us how to heal people, communities and the world.

Healing is one of the great works of the Holy Spirit. God is a God who heals. God is revealed in Scripture as Adonai Rophe, (Ex 15.26) God who Heals. Jesus healed people. His disciples healed people. In Jesus name we can heal people.

As we come out of lockdown, there is a great need for healing in our communities. Some of that need is physical. I want to teach you a model of healing prayer that **invokes the Holy Spirit** – and will at time see success, but is also always respectful so that when you pray with people they feel valued and loved even if there is no apparent change. You can be Jesus with skin on.

Coming out of lockdown there are a lot of anxious and depressed people, people who have been surviving on adrenalin and as you take the adrenalin away they are collapsing and exhausted and for many of them a kind word and a loving prayer will genuinely help bring healing. Loving prayer is healing, it is not a placebo, having someone pray for you heals. You can be Jesus with skin on.

Looking to America at the moment we are seeing frustration at boiling point, many people horrified at the senseless taking of a life displaying an engrained systemic racism are marching, many people are being shut out of the economy feel they have nothing to lose and are shouting, and yet others deeply disillusioned are trying to burn down civil society. It feels like we are watching a house divided against itself. The healing our world needs is a deep healing, raising up an economy where everyone can find a place, fighting the virus of racial prejudice and re-rooting a system of justice where every person and every corporation is accountable and treated equally before the law. We can pray for that healing also. Let us pray for the new heavens and the new earth Jesus proclaimed.

- A. Today we are going to look at this story of healing, and then compare it with a story of Jesus healing.
- B. We are going to look at the topic of holistic healing, I want to place healing within the context of God's slow plan to heal the world.
- C. We are going to have a look at a model of healing prayer and encourage you to practice this, whether you are 5 years old or 95.

Peter and John were going about their day. They were going to pray. It is clear prayer was part of their regular habit. Both men had recently experienced a great filling of the Holy Spirit. The prophet Joel had said that the Spirit was to be poured out on all people. We think of Peter and John as heroes, but at this stage they are still just a couple of ordinary fishermen that Jesus had selected and taught.

They saw a man by the gate to the temple, who was lame from birth. That meant he was excluded from the inner part of the temple (Lev 21:18) and he needed to be carried around. He made his living by begging. I wonder whether he was a bit like some of the affable beggars we know in Tauranga.

He asked Peter and John for something. He asked specifically for money, but what matters is that he asked.

Peter looked straight at him and asked the man to look at them. It's a strange phrase. I think what it meant is that Peter gave him his attention. Peter saw the man and Peter asked the man to see him. There is a human encounter here.

The man payed attention in return, he had some expectation.

Then Peter delivered this great statement. Silver and gold I have none. Hmm – nothing in his pocket? Surely Peters had some coins. But maybe not. Or maybe Peter was acknowledging I really don't have the financial ability to help you. But what I do have I give. This is a deep biblical principal – give what you have.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – get up and walk. Now you won't usually hear people say in the name of the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, and always points to Jesus. Peter spoke out the healing.

Then what did he do? He took the man by the hand and got him to stand up. And in the process of standing the man was healed.

He jumped and leapt around. He was really excited. And he praised God. He knew who healed him. And everyone around knew what had happened.

A simple healing.

Now I want to take you back to the start of Jesus ministry. When four friends brought a man to Jesus. They took the roof off a building to lower him down. Jesus started by forgiving the man's sins, and then he healed him. Luke 5:24 ...*"But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"* So he said to the paralyzed man, *"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."* Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Again a word of healing was spoken and the man responded.

In Luke 9.1 Jesus gave the disciples authority to heal. *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases.* In Luke 10:9 he instructs them to heal. *Heal the sick who are there and tell them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you"*.

You see in Acts 3 Peter and John were now doing what Jesus had commanded them to do. They had done it before, but now they did it alone. Jesus wants us to be a healing ministry in this community. That means being willing to offer to pray for people for healing. Sensitively, but with courage.

I know many of you will be skeptical, it's a strange thing to do to offer to pray for someone for healing and actually expect that something might change. But I challenge you to do so, and do so more often. Now all healing in this world is really about praying for more time. I have several friends with cancer who I am praying for; one an older man my prayer is that he will see another Christmas. For others it's an unlimited prayer. We will all eventually die, so ultimate healing is in the next world. This week my father would have turned 100. Our prayer for him 7 years ago was for a good end, and he had a great end.

But be bold and offer to pray.

All healing needs to be set within a context of the brokenness of this world; Jesus is busy on his plan to heal everything with a new heaven and a new earth. Prayer for healing means also means praying for healing the circumstances. *There are also objective unjust circumstances which make people sick... So it is often impossible to heal the sick without healing their relationship, the circumstances in which they live, and the*

*sort of structure of the social systems to which they belong".* Said Jürgen Moltman in 1990 in his book The Way of Jesus Christ.

And we have seen this here in Tauranga with the response to COVID 19 we have seen our brothers and sisters who were living on the streets and in tents gathered up and given dignified accommodation in motels and hotels –and there is significant healing going on. God has been at work in the lockdown. I reflect on Peter words, silver and gold have I none. Sometimes I think we have plenty of silver and gold in the west and God is expecting us to use it.

Jesus healings were always connected to overcoming barriers to God. John talks about Jesus healings as signs to the rejected, the helpless, the despised and the excluded. Let's pray for each other, but let's not forget to pray for the poor, the lost and the last; because there God commends a blessing.

Let me give you a simple model: Four Don'ts and Four Do's.

1. **Don't Manipulate.** Holy Spirit prayer is not about manipulation, it is not about pushing someone over, it is not pressuring, it's being gentle.
2. **Don't Deny.** Holy Spirit prayer is not about denial – don't deny that illness and grief really hurts, that systemic injustice makes us sick; don't shout loudly and now pretend to be well. It's saying, you may not be healed this time, we can always pray again and we love you whether you are healed or not.
3. **Don't Pretend.** Holy Spirit prayer is not trickery. When God heals, your doctor will be able to see the result. Jesus sent the people he healed to get checked out.
4. **Don't Exploit.** Holy Spirit healing is not about exploitation. Christian healing practice is not done in secret and makes no room for sexual assault or other exploitation, if people feel uncomfortable then you are doing it wrong.

Four dos. Listen, Look, speak, touch.

1. **Listen.** Christian Healing starts with a request, you might offer prayer, but we never impose. Would you like me to pray for you? And then really we should ask, what would you like me to pray for? In our example the man was clearly asking for money but Peter gave him something better. When we look at the healing ministry of Jesus he almost always asks people what they want. Listen. A good doctor will always listen to your story before they prescribe. Listen to the person and listen to what God might be saying.
2. **Look.** Look beyond the surface – are they uncomfortable, are you missing something? This person is talking about a sore leg, but actually they haven't eaten in days. Look past the immediate problem and ask if they know Jesus. Can you see God doing anything else in their life? Now be gracious and careful, but see what God might be doing. Ask God for a vision or an insight. This is probably the most dangerous part I'm suggesting because you could get it wrong. But if you offer rather than impose it will be OK. I often think of the way David Mayston gets picture for people from God. Sickness is not always only physical we all suffering from psychological and stress related illnesses as well as family illnesses and spiritual sickness. Sometimes God heals by giving us a new perspective on an old hurt.
3. **Speak.** This is the key to it all, pray for healing. Ask God to heal. Ask for peace. Ask for strength. Keep your eyes open as you pray and look to see if God is doing anything. Don't rush. Give thanks. There is no formula but a scripture verse might come to you. Speak that out. I remember visiting Joy when she was terminal, I prayed for peace. The family asked – aren't you going to pray for healing. Even though we all knew Joy was dying, we prayed for healing; and she had another good 6 months.
4. **Finally Touch.** Jesus often touched people as he healed, it is a touch of kindness and connection, you don't have to touch the part of a person that is sick, if we have a flu you don't need to touch someone's nose. A touch on the shoulder often conveys love. And here's the most important part – touch their spirit. Care. Say I will pray again. Do you know the phrase 'he really touched me?'

That's what you want. Christian healing is not mechanical, if someone goes away from prayer feeling touched then God is at work.

Listen, Look, Speak and Touch. You can be Jesus with skin on.

We are going to give you a chance after the last hymn to offer to pray for the person next to you.