

Lessons in Healing from the Chapel Windows

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Healing Prayers & Practices



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When Good Shepherd's stained-glass windows were being designed, the chapel space was used, as it is today, for healing ministry on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. With this in mind, the stained-glass artist created designs related to Jesus' healing miracles for the four small windows in the chapel.

If you need healing, if you are concerned for a friend or family member, you may find it helpful to spend some time in prayer before these windows. They are reminders of Jesus' continuing presence with you, bringing wholeness even now through your compassion, your silence and your words.

To assist you in your prayer time, the first section of this booklet offers some reflections about Christian healing, illustrated by the stories depicted in these stained-glass windows.

Featuring an older man, a woman, a girl, and a younger man, each one living with an "impossible to heal" condition, the images represent the universality of the healing Jesus offers. No person and no condition is excluded. They depict, from left to right:

- A paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15)
This man had been ill for 38 years. Though he was seeking healing, he had no way to reach the healing water.
- A woman with long-term hemorrhaging (Mark 5:25-34, Matthew 9:20-22, Luke 8:43-48)
She had suffered 12 years and had spent all her money on physicians, to no avail. Because of her condition, the religious laws prevented her touching Jesus or joining a crowd of his followers (Lev. 15:25).
- A 12-year-old girl who had died by the time Jesus arrived at her home (Mark 5:21-24,35-43; Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-42,49-56)
- A man who was blind from birth (John 9)
According to the gospel, such a healing had never happened before.

The second section, "Healing Prayers & Practices," focuses on methods and challenges in this ministry.

The Role of Faith in Healing

Man at the Pool -- The man at the Pool of Bethesda shows by his daily presence at the pool that he has some hope, even in this apparently hopeless situation. That hope is not faith in Jesus however. He initially sees Jesus not as a healer but as a potential helper to the pool, which he believes to be the instrument of God's healing. (Tradition holds that Raphael, the archangel of healing, troubled the waters and so brought God's power there.) His faith in Jesus comes *after* being healed by him.

Woman with hemorrhage -- The hemorrhaging woman demonstrates faith in Jesus by violating the religious law (Lev. 15:25) in order to be in the crowd around him and touch his clothes. Her faith is dynamic and Jesus-centered; it has propelled her into his presence. She believes that she needs only a glancing touch of his garment to find healing, and Jesus commends her faith as instrumental to her healing.

Jairus' daughter -- The gospel tells us nothing of the 12-year-old's faith. She is upheld by the faith of her father Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. When his daughter is on the verge of death, Jairus believes that Jesus can heal her. But when he hears the report that she has actually died, he needs Jesus' encouragement to continue believing healing is still possible. This places Jairus in a situation similar to his daughter's, in that he must be upheld by Jesus' faith, as she must be upheld by her father's faith.

Blind man -- The story of the man born blind reveals nothing of the man's initial faith. But he does allow Jesus to touch his eyes, and he follows Jesus' instruction to wash at the Pool of Siloam. That is a sign that he has some hope of healing his hopeless condition. Like the man at the Pool of Bethesda, the man healed of blindness comes to faith in Jesus *after, and because of,* his healing. Initially, his faith is more an attitude of "What do I have to lose by doing what this man says?"

Where do you locate your faith on this continuum from "What do I have to lose?" to "If I can only touch the hem of his garment?"

Who Initiates Healing?

Sometimes it seems that healing drops upon us without our asking, as if Jesus has sought us out and pursued us. Other times friends or family members intercede for us or assist us in finding healing. Often we seek healing directly for ourselves. We see all these modeled in the chapel windows.

Man at the Pool– Jesus singles out this one man among many sick at the pool and asks if he wants to be healed.

Woman with hemorrhage – The woman, surreptitiously and alone, seeks out Jesus.

Jairus' daughter – Her father seeks healing from Jesus for his daughter.

Blind man – We don't know who initiates this event. It says "Jesus saw a man blind from birth." His disciples then ask Jesus a question about sin being the source of the man's blindness. Perhaps because that question sounds more like a desire to judge the man than to heal him, Jesus responds by healing him and demonstrates to his disciples the "glory of God."

Are you seeking healing, or is healing seeking you?

What conditions and illnesses can be healed?

Jesus heals all kinds of conditions and diseases. These four stories are examples of conditions we can view literally or metaphorically in praying for ourselves and others.

Man at the Pool – long-term *paralysis*

Woman with hemorrhage – long-term *bleeding*

Jairus' daughter – *very sick* and at the point of death ... then actually *dead*

Blind man – *blind* from birth

Which condition is most like the one you are praying for?

Expectations and Surprises

An experience of healing often contains a twist, a surprise, a challenge for the one seeking healing. Life isn't the same afterward. Agnes Sanford, an Episcopal laywoman known for her ministry of healing, believed that many people miss out on healing because they resist the twist, so to speak. They want to be healed, but with no associated life change. If the two go hand in hand, then you can't have one without the other.

Man at the Pool – The man probably expects Jesus, at best, will help him into the pool if the water stirs. Instead Jesus offers him immediate healing, independent of the waters or the stirring. But first he has to capture the man's attention with the surprising and possibly challenging question, "Do you want to be healed?"

Woman with hemorrhage – Her expectations are met with regard to physical healing. However, she is surprised and intimidated by Jesus' invitation to reveal herself as the one healed, and to tell her story.

Jairus' daughter – Jairus' hope and expectation is that Jesus will arrive at the house before his daughter dies and will prevent her death. Shockingly, she dies before Jesus arrives, and Jairus has to persevere in faith, believing Jesus can actually raise her to life again.

Blind man – We don't know about this man's expectation, or whether he asks for healing. It is doubtful he expects to be healed, since no one had seen a person blind from birth healed before, and he does not even know who Jesus is. Surely he does not anticipate the antagonism he experiences from the religious leaders when his healing becomes public knowledge. The healing takes him, formerly a beggar and a nobody, to appearing before, and arguing with, some of the most powerful people in his community.

Are you willing to accept unexpected twists and life changes along with healing?

Telling the story

An experience of healing sometimes involves relating a story, going public. The story may lead to healing, or it may follow afterward, and it can have unanticipated consequences.

Man at the Pool – Jesus asks the man if he wants to be healed. The question prompts his story of long-term illness, persistence in coming to the pool, and lack of support in getting to the healing water. The story leads to his being healed. Afterward, when confronted by the Jewish leaders, he tells them about his healing, explaining why he is violating the Sabbath regulations. His identification of Jesus as the Sabbath healer leads the Jewish leaders to persecute Jesus.

Woman with hemorrhage – After her healing, Jesus invites her forward to identify herself and tell her story. She has a story of long-term illness, failed treatments, financial ruin, and marginalization. But she also has a story of faith, that when she touched just the hem of his robe she was instantly healed. Telling her story brings her a deeper social healing than her physical change alone could have. Her uncleanness has been publicly removed.

Jairus' daughter – Jairus tells Jesus of his daughter's condition and begs Jesus to come to his house to heal her. His story begins the journey to healing, and to greater faith.

Blind man – When he realizes that he can see, the man relates his story of how the healing happened, to members of his community and to the Pharisees. The community already knows very well the prior story of the blind beggar, so they are astounded. His discussion with the Pharisees turns so confrontational that they excommunicate him.

*What story are you telling Jesus about your desire to be healed?
When you experience healing, whom would you want to tell first,
and what would you hope to say?*

What effect might your story have?

Stretching your boundaries

The steps to healing may not lie along your accustomed path. You could have to move well out of your comfort zone.

Man at the Pool– This man continues to do the same thing, hoping each day for a different result. He looks neither to the right nor to the left. He goes regularly to the Pool of Bethesda, a place known for healing. But because he has no one there to help him to the pool, he knows nothing will change unless he gets support at the right time, when the waters are stirred by an angel – a completely unpredictable event that probably happens rarely. He has become accustomed to this daily pattern. When Jesus arrives, he first has to re-direct the man’s attention to something besides the pool.

Woman with hemorrhage – She is one who reaches well beyond her customary boundaries, violating the religious restrictions of her time. A woman who was hemorrhaging was considered unclean and was not allowed to be in physical proximity to others (Leviticus 15:25). Yet she joins a crowd and touches Jesus’ clothing. In doing so, she risks the criticism and rejection of her community.

Jairus’ daughter – Jairus, a synagogue leader, kneels at Jesus’ feet. As a religious leader, this would be going beyond the customary behavior for someone of his stature. Also, continuing to take Jesus to his daughter even after she has died is an outrageous act of belief that makes him a target of ridicule before his daughter is healed.

Blind man – Since this had never happened before, the man’s willingness to follow Jesus’ instructions, demonstrating at least some hope of healing, is quite a stretch. The confrontation afterward with the religious leaders, broadening to include his parents as well, must have made him quite uncomfortable.

Are your boundaries pliable? Are you willing to stretch them to find your path to healing?

Sin and Healing

Sometimes sin may be related to illness, but it doesn't seem to be a barrier to healing. Repentance may occur either before or after healing. Therefore, it is more helpful to focus on God – grace, love, mercy, goodness, power – than to look for some sin at the source of the condition. Keep your eyes on the source of healing rather than the source of illness.

Man at the Pool– Jesus suggests, when he sees the man after the healing, that sin may have been a factor in the man's paralysis. However, if that is the case, it did not prevent his being healed. Jesus did not require the man to repent in order to receive healing.

Woman with hemorrhage – Her condition made her “unclean” and so she would have been treated like a sinner – kept from religious ceremonies and sacred areas. But her uncleanness did not stand in the way of healing.

Jairus' daughter – no information related to sin

Blind man – Since Jesus' disciples ask him whose sin caused the man to be born blind, it seems the general understanding was that sin caused disabilities and birth defects. However, Jesus tells them that sin is not the cause here. Instead, this happened so that God's glory could be revealed. He shifts their focus from the man's condition to God, from the cause of the condition to what God can do with it.

Are your prayers for healing more focused on illness and its possible cause, on your failures, or on God?

Praying for Others

Sometimes intercession involves going to Jesus on behalf of someone else. Other times it is more like going to a person on behalf of Jesus, letting them know he is near and eager to heal.

Man at the Pool – It seems that someone told Jesus about the man who had been there so many years. Because of this information, Jesus singled him out to be healed.

Woman with hemorrhage – Nothing is said in the story, but she must have heard from someone where Jesus would be that day. As marginalized as she was by her unclean condition, she still had conversations with people. Whoever gave her that information changed her life.

Jairus' daughter – Jairus goes to Jesus on behalf of his daughter, and then goes to his daughter bringing Jesus along with him.

Blind man – No specific information.

If you are praying for someone else, how have you brought them into Jesus' presence?

Is there a way you can take Jesus to them, or help them find him?

By Word and Touch

In the many gospel stories of Jesus' healing, whenever details of the encounter are described, Jesus either speaks or touches a person in a way that results in wholeness. Sometimes he does both. Today, when Jesus is present with us by the Holy Spirit, people still report hearing, within their minds or from the lips of an intercessor, a word of power, or feeling touched by warmth or something like electricity. And in that moment they are changed. Christian healing is relational ministry that often requires personal engagement on the part of the intercessor, as the Holy Spirit works through them. This is exemplified in the Rite of Anointing for Healing, the sacrament of unction, in which the person is anointed with oil and words of healing are spoken over them.

Man at the Pool – Jesus says to the man, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” And the man who has not been able to stand or walk for 38 years suddenly does just that.

Woman with hemorrhage – The woman touches Jesus' clothing, and he feels power flow out from him when she does. After she reveals herself and tells her story, he says, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.” These words indicate both social and physical healing. He is renaming her a daughter of Israel, no longer an outcast.

Jairus' daughter – Jesus heals Jairus' faith when he says, “Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved.” He raises Jairus' daughter with both word and touch, taking her by the hand and saying, “*Talitha, cum,*” meaning “Little girl, get up!” And the dead girl rises to life again.

Blind man – Jesus anoints the man's eyes with mud of saliva and earth and tells him, “Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam.” The man does, and he comes back seeing.

Have you had an experience of the Spirit's word or touch? What was the result?

Do you pray for others in a way that engages you with them personally, verbally, physically?

Healing Prayers
&
Practices

Prayers based on scripture

Lord's prayer

*(adapted from "Let Us Pray" by James P. Pecquet
in "Sharing: a Journal of Christian Healing" September 2002)*

Our Father in heaven,
You are entirely holy, yet you dwell with us.
May your kingdom come and your will be done
In _____'s life as it is in heaven.
Give **her** this day the healing you wish for **her**.
And grant **her** mercy to forgive
so that **she** may fully receive your forgiveness.
Let **her** not become discouraged or give up hope,
But deliver **her** from all brokenness of body and spirit,
For you are the Great Physician and Healer,
And the glory of this healing is yours alone.

Aaron's Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26)

God of all blessing,
Bless _____ and watch over **her**.
Make the light of your presence shine all around **her**,
And give **her** all the good **she** can receive.
Raise up your life within **her**,
And make **her** well,
And make **her** whole,
And give **her** peace.

Psalm 23

Lord, you are _____'s shepherd.
With you, *she* lacks nothing.
Give *her* rest in peaceful places
and guidance *she* can trust.
Restore *her* soul as well as *her* body.
Lead *her* in truth and in right action
For your name's sake.
Grant *her* courage
even in the face of death.
Comfort *her* with your protection.
Grant *her* calm assurance amid all threats.
Pour out your blessing upon *her*,
and your gifts in overflowing abundance.
Surround *her* with goodness and mercy
All the days of *her* life.
And may *she* dwell in your house forever.

Adapt these prayers to your situation, or create your own healing prayers from favorite scripture passages, using these as a model.

You can find more prayers for healing in the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church USA 1979, pages 453-461 (“Ministration to the Sick”)

Healing Ministry Methods

These ideas are based on the work of Agnes Sanford, an Episcopal laywoman and author known for her ministry of healing. She encouraged people to approach spiritual reality “scientifically,” experimenting with different methods and assessing the results. She especially emphasized engaging your imagination, growing in faith, and expressing gratitude. Here are some methods you can try when praying for yourself or for other people. Try one or more of these practices for at least a month and then assess whether you have experienced any benefit from it.

Visualize: When you find yourself focused on your problem, instead visualize yourself doing what you would do if you felt well, doing something you love to do. Or visualize the disease disappearing. Imagine yourself, or the diseased body part, surrounded by and infused with God’s healing light. What would wellness look like? Focus on that.

Increase your faith: Pray and read scripture that reminds you of God’s goodness, forgiveness, and power to heal. Think about the boundaries of your belief in these attributes. At the same time, offer any unbelief or resistance to God as you pray for greater faith. (“Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.”)

Express gratitude: Instead of continually pleading with God to act, imaginatively see yourself well or the problem settled and thank God that this is already in the works. God has not been waiting for you to pray before doing anything. God has been at work and has awakened you to the need so that you can participate in God’s work of healing. Give thanks for that.

Choose to believe: In each moment of our lives, we have a choice – Will we act and think as if God, as Jesus revealed him, is real (good, present with us, forgiving, at work making us whole)? Or will we act and think as if the God of Jesus is not real (apathetic or harsh, absent, punitive, inactive)? Whenever you have the chance, remind yourself of God’s reality, *God is* as God is revealed in Jesus.

Carry a reminder of a holy encounter: This may help in the “choose to believe” experiment. Have you ever had an experience of goodness, beauty, mercy, healing – an encounter that changed your outlook on life or left you in a state of wonder?

It may have been in hearing a poem, attending a concert, visiting a museum, reading a book, walking in nature, praying, considering the universe, listening to someone speak, or playing with a child. For a moment you may have been brought to tears or to a quiet state of amazement.

If you have had such an experience, keep a photograph or symbol of that encounter in your pocket, on a key chain, or on your desk. As you touch it or look at it, remember the original experience. This was a moment when spiritual reality came close, when “the kingdom of God came near you.” That moment still resides in your memory, and it can continue to open the door to the kingdom for you as you recall it and give thanks for it.

Then why are some people not healed?

Since healing is universally offered and no condition is beyond Jesus' ability to heal, why do most of us see complete physical healing only occasionally? Why do people continue to suffer and die when surrounded by prayer?

This apparent contradiction can be a barrier to our engaging in healing prayer. It is a question we all struggle with, but we need to find a way to live faithfully with the mystery. Here are some ideas to consider.

Who is at fault?

This question is somewhat like the disciples' question in the story of the fourth window (John 9). They ask Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" We ask, "Whose fault is it, the one who prays or the one seeking healing or God, that this healing did not happen?" In John's gospel, Jesus answers the disciples saying essentially, "Don't be concerned with finding fault but with what God can do in this situation."

We can always grow in our knowledge and practice of healing ministry, and growing does require honest self-assessment. But tarrying too long in self-focus, or looking for fault in the one seeking healing, leads us away from effective ministry. To follow Jesus' model is to change the question to, "How can God work in this situation now? Where is God's love and power moving now?"

A too-familiar view of Jesus (Matthew 13:57-59; Mark 6:5-6)

There is only one story of constrained healing in the gospels—in Nazareth where the community's unbelief seems to have limited what Jesus could do. The unbelief Jesus found in Nazareth was a familiarity that led the people to discount his power. Jesus had grown up there, and they could not see him as anyone other than the carpenter, the son of Joseph and Mary, one among several brothers and sisters whom they knew personally.

Even in the face of Nazareth's unbelief, he was able to heal a few

sick people. So while it was a hindrance, their unbelief did not completely preclude healing.

If your experience of healing is quite limited despite a regular habit of prayer, it may be helpful to consider whether your view of Jesus is too familiar, too tame. Take some time to prayerfully review synonyms and antonyms for the word “dynamic,” and see which group of words feels closest to your sense of Jesus. (“Dynamic” is related to *dunamis*, the Greek word for Jesus’ power and ability to work miracles.)

If the antonyms, rather than the synonyms, feel more like Jesus, ask him to help you break out of that worldview to encounter him on his own terms, with dynamic authority and power.

Human limits (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30)

There is also only one gospel story of a situation where Jesus appears reluctant to heal. In this story of the Canaanite woman, the hindering factor was Jesus’ human limitation. He was exhausted and was on his way to rest in a Gentile area, away from the needs of Israel, when the woman began following his group begging for healing for her daughter. First Jesus ignored her, then he quoted her a proverb whose meaning was, “I don’t have the energy to meet the needs of Israel’s people and heal your daughter too.” God had called him to Israel first. Despite his exhaustion he did heal the woman’s daughter, so even his human limits weren’t enough of a barrier to stifle his power.

If human limitation is a factor, then we can respond by “sending more laborers into the harvest.” Rather than becoming discouraged by our limited experience of healing, we can convert it into a motivation to get involved, and even to recruit others to join in the task.

Surely we will see more healing take place if we actively engage in the ministry than if we hang back wondering why we don’t see everyone healed.