

THEME: The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus

“The Healing Ministry of Jesus”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – based on a sermon series by Adam Hamilton

February 23-24, 2013 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

Mark 1:21-28, 32-34

21 Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum. When the Sabbath day came, he went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22 The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law. 23 Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit began shouting, 24 “Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One sent from God!” 25 Jesus cut him short. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. 26 At that, the evil spirit screamed, threw the man into a convulsion, and then came out of him. 27 Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened. “What sort of new teaching is this?” they asked excitedly. “It has such authority! Even evil spirits obey his orders!” 28 The news about Jesus spread quickly throughout the entire region of Galilee.

32 That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. 33 The whole town gathered at the door to watch. 34 So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.

VIDEO Sermon Starter – The Healing Ministry of Jesus

SLIDE The Healing Ministry of Jesus

I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. There is a place for you to take notes and there are pens and pencils in the pew pockets in front of you and I hope you will take some time to write anything down that you want to remember from today's message. If you are watching at home or online I invite you to take out a piece of paper and something to write with and then you can download this resource off our website later. You also will find daily Scripture readings and questions to think about throughout the week. I really want to encourage you during this season of Lent, which is the 40 days and 7 Sundays before Easter, to make this a daily discipline.

All of the Scripture readings that you have for this week will take you back to the places that we are visiting this week in the sermon. These readings come from the ministry of Jesus in Capernaum which was the home base of Jesus during his three years of public ministry. They also are healing stories and so they tie back into the theme of today's message.

Today we continue in a new sermon series on Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus, in which we are looking at historical background, archeological findings, and stories of the faith to retrace the footsteps of Jesus from his baptism and temptation in the desert to his crucifixion and resurrection. Along the way we will meet the people he loved and healed, the enemies he made, listen to the parables he taught and see some of the roads he traveled. We are going to try and understand Jesus more clearly and go deeper in our own faith during this series of sermons. We started last week with the way Mark's gospel begins with the baptism of Jesus. Today we will move north to the area of Galilee and then finally head back to Jerusalem where Jesus is crucified and then raised from the dead.

Our aim is not just to teach you biblical geography and archaeology, but also to learn something about who Jesus is and what it means to be his follower today. The goal is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and be the presence of Christ every day in our lives.

Some of you have asked how big it is in the holy land and so I thought I would share with you this diagram of how the nation of Israel fits into the United States.

SLIDE Map of Israel in Colorado (picture)

You can see that the entire Holy Land would fit into part of our state. It is 8,000 square miles, 263 miles North to South and between 9 and 71 miles East to West. That means if you go from Durango to Fairplay you would go the distance from North to South in Israel and from here to Pagosa is the width.

SLIDE Holy Land Map – Week 2 (picture)

As we begin today let's get our bearings straight again. You have a map inside of your bulletin that looks like this map on the video screen. We began last week down here in the southern end of the holy land at the Jordan River at the place for we believe that Jesus was baptized.

5 miles from this location is the Mount of Temptation that we looked at last week and it is the place where tradition holds that Jesus experienced temptation in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. After John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus left this area and went up the Jordan River Valley most likely taking this route that you see on the video screen.

VIDEO Judea to Nazareth Route

SLIDE Sea of Galilee Map with Capernaum (picture)

Jesus came to his hometown of Nazareth. Let me remind you of what happens in that town during his brief stay there. There is one brief story about Jesus preaching in his hometown of Nazareth in a small synagogue which was most likely the place that he worshiped as a young boy. Remember that there are maybe a 100 people in Nazareth and 150 at the most. It was a small, no nothing town which wasn't even listed on any maps in the first century. Most likely the people in attendance at his first sermon were cousins and aunts and uncles and friends who knew him because he grew up with them.

Jesus preached from a passage in Isaiah which says, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." You read the bit more of that passage and then he says, "Today, this passage is fulfilled in your hearing." Remember that the word "anointed" in Hebrew is "**mashah**" from which we get the word "**Messiah**" and it is "**Christos**" in Greek so when Jesus speaks these words he is claiming to be the Messiah. The people were outraged. They were offended by what he said and some of them took him to the edge of town to throw him off of a cliff. These people that he grew up with looked at him and said, "Who do you think you are claiming to be the Messiah?"

SLIDE Road from Nazareth to Capernaum (picture)

He is rejected at his hometown and then walks for two days until he reaches the community of Capernaum. I wonder what it was like for Jesus to walk those two days alone by himself having been rejected by everybody he grew up with and everybody who knew him, including much of his family? You can see a picture of this ancient road that goes from Nazareth to the Sea of Galilee on the video screen.

No doubt Jesus had been to the Sea of Galilee before and he may have even known the people that he was going to call his disciples. This area becomes his home for the next three years. Remember that in the Gospels there are only

three years of Jesus' life that are really recorded, from age 30 to 33. On the video screen you will see us take this route from Nazareth to Capernaum.

VIDEO Nazareth to Capernaum Route

SLIDE Nazareth to Capernaum Map (picture)

Jesus would've come through the mountain range on the Ancient Road that you saw earlier. As he came to the Sea of Galilee he walked around to the North West edge of the sea to the town of Capernaum. The Sea of Galilee is about 6 miles across and about 13 miles from north to south.

SLIDE Sea of Galilee with Cities (picture)

In this aerial photo you can see where 80% of Jesus' ministry took place. You can see the town of Tabgha, where it is believed that Jesus did the miracle of the loaves and fishes and preached to the people from a boat. The mount of the Beatitudes is where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. Moving around the lake you will see Capernaum. The city on the far right of your picture is Bethsaida, which means "house of fish." It is located at the mouth of the upper Jordan River which flows into the Sea of Galilee between Capernaum and Bethsaida. The city provided fish for most of the Roman Empire in this region during the first century. To the right of Bethsaida is where Jesus took a boat from Capernaum to the region of the Garasenes where he cast out a demon from a man who was living among the tombs. Most of Jesus' ministry occurs in the area that you see in this picture which is about the size of La Plata County.

SLIDE Capernaum – The Town of Jesus (picture)

The Scripture story that we are going to focus on today happens in the town of Capernaum which is known as the hometown of Jesus. 12 miracles are recorded in the town of Capernaum and more than anywhere else in the Gospels we find this to be a place of healing and exorcisms. Jesus preaches and teaches most often in this city and when you go to the ruins in Capernaum which have been excavated you will find ruins from the first century. I want to show you some of the ruins of Capernaum and so look at the video clip on the video screen with me.

VIDEO Ruins of Capernaum

SLIDE Capernaum – The Town of Jesus (picture)

As you look at the ruins you will notice that the stone is black basalt stone from the volcanoes which erupted 4 million years ago in the area. The lava flows from this volcano eruption form the Sea of Galilee. All of the towns and villages around the Sea of Galilee are formed in this same stone. You can see the olive presses and the millstones so we know that in this town they milled the grain and pressed olives for all of oil. When you see the white limestone you need to understand that those stones were imported from a different region. The homes of that region were small, about 500 to 600 feet in size.

The city was modest and it was home to a Roman Centurion who built the synagogue for the Jewish people there. He was sympathetic to them and he perhaps believed in God himself. A Roman Centurion would've had 100 soldiers assigned to him and his garrison and so at least that many lived in this community during the first century. We also know that it was home to a Roman's customs office and the name of the customs officer was Matthew. He became one of Jesus' disciples.

We also know from the Gospels that seven of the 12 disciples came from Capernaum. Can you see how important this town is the life and ministry of Jesus?

There are two sites at Capernaum that are important and help bring the Bible to life. The first is the synagogue which is built out of white limestone which was once again imported into the area. It was built in the 300s on top of the exact framework of the foundation of the first century synagogue where Jesus ministered. Take a look at some of the photos.

SLIDE Synagogue at Capernaum Sign (picture)

SLIDE Synagogue at Capernaum (picture)

SLIDE Synagogue at Capernaum 2 (picture)

You might be able to imagine Jesus standing in the middle of this synagogue with crowds on three sides as he preaches to them and teaches them. This is where the sick would come and he would heal them. Jesus alienated the religious leaders of this synagogue. It was here that the religious leaders began to plot to kill Jesus because of the work that he did and the words that he spoke in this place.

The other ruins that are powerful to see when you are in Capernaum are the ones that you can see on the video screen in this video.

VIDEO Ruins at Peter's House

SLIDE Peter's House (Picture)

This is an octagonal shaped building that was uncovered in the last century. Inside of that building were the remains of a first century house. The octagonal building was built in the 300s and whenever you see a building with eight sides in the Greco-Roman world built around the 300s it was almost always a church. This is the first shape that Christians built their buildings in and you will find octagonal church buildings during that entire era.

There are two reasons that they used an eight sided building. First, seven was the number for completeness because you have seven days a week and seven orifices in your head (two ears, two nostrils, two eyes and one mouth). The number eight signified beyond completeness which meant perfection. When the Christians in the first few centuries thought about what form their buildings should take they thought about the Lord that they served and they saw him as complete perfection. Eight sides in the building represented Jesus for them.

Second, the number eight represented the eighth day the week. If the first day of the week is Sunday than what is the eighth day of the week? It is Sunday also. What important event in the life of Jesus happened on a Sunday? It was his resurrection. You can't build a one-sided building and so an eight sided building signified the resurrection of Christ. They wanted to capture the perfection of Christ and the resurrection of Christ in the way that they built their buildings. The earliest Christians used an octagon as a way of symbolizing who Jesus was.

So why would they build a church around the remains of a home? The house must've been very important. I wonder whose house it was?

When Jesus first arrives in Capernaum, after he cast out a demon and he preaches in a synagogue, he goes to Simon Peter's house. He heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law, he teaches and he casts out demons. Every time we read about a house in Capernaum it is likely that he is in Peter's house. Remember that Jesus didn't have a home, so where do you think he stayed?

The thought has been that the house they built that first church in Capernaum on top of was the house of Simon Peter which was where Jesus

stayed for the three years of his public ministry in Capernaum. There is something special about being in this place and the Roman Catholics built a church on top of it which kind of looks like a spaceship.

SLIDE Peter's House Church (picture)

You can still see the ruins below and it is designed to protect the ruins. When you go inside the church you will find the house of Simon Peter and Jesus below a floor of glass so when you worship there you are joining with all of those Christians who worshipped back in the first century in a house, and all the people who came there to be healed from the demons and to hear the word of the Lord from his own lips. That is what you can see when you go to Capernaum.

SLIDE Interior of Peter's House Church (picture)

The last photo I want to share with you from Capernaum is an aerial view of these two ruins before they built a church, so you can see how close they are to one another.

SLIDE Peter's House and Synagogue Ruins

Now let's turn our attention to what happened in those two places in the Scripture reading we have before us today. In Mark chapter 1 Jesus shows up in a synagogue in Capernaum and he preaches with authority, as you would expect God's son to preach if you walked on the earth. During his sermon, he is interrupted, and I can tell you from experience that is rather unnerving to be interrupted in the middle of the sermon. This has happened to me a few times as a preacher. One time I had a person have a heart attack in the middle of my sermon. They thought my sermon was just giving them heartburn but it turned out to be much more serious! On another occasion I had someone have a seizure in the midst of my sermon. I also have had someone struggling with mental illness come forward in the middle of the sermon before.

When Jesus was preaching that first sermon in Capernaum, a man stood up and began to shout at him.

SLIDE *"Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One sent from God!"*

Jesus says, "Shut up and get out!" He doesn't speak that to the man, but the spirit which was inside of him which was afflicting him. The man begins to

convulse and he screams in a loud voice and the spirit leaves. The man is made whole. Everyone around was astounded by what happened and they began to spread the news throughout the region and people came to Jesus to hear him preach and to see what else would happen in the middle of this sermon.

On several occasions I have been approached by members of the congregation who have asked me about all of the demon possession that we see in the Gospels and they have asked me flat-out, "Do you believe in demons?" My first response is always, "Of course I do. I go and watch them play football and basketball sometimes!" If they happen to have a student at the high school I will even say, "Don't you live with one?"

After they roll their eyes at me and ask me to give them a serious answer I tell them, "It's complicated."

In the first century, when people reached their limit of the knowledge of medical problems, then whatever else they couldn't explain they attributed to demons. They actually believed that fevers were caused by demons. They didn't understand the hypothalamus or infections or bacteria. You would "cast out" a fever because it was a demon that was afflicting someone.

In the first century, when someone had their eyes roll up in their head and they had convulsions and maybe even fell to the ground, sometimes foaming at the mouth, they didn't understand anything about epilepsy. How else would you explain this? It was considered a demon would come upon someone.

I lived with a stepbrother who had paranoia and schizophrenia. If someone acted like that in the first century, or they were experiencing a multiple personality disorder and they were talking to themselves, then how else would you explain that except demons?

The biblical scholar William Barclay talks about how demons were treated in the first century. There were times when doctors would cut a piece of your skull out to allow the demon to escape through the hole in your head. Then they would put that little piece of your skull on a necklace and make it an amulet that you wore around your neck as a way of protecting you from demons. They found one cemetery where 5% of the people who were buried had holes cut open in their heads to treat the demons because this was the way that people understood medical conditions during the first century.

Do you see why it's a little complicated? Much of what we read in the gospels seems like medical conditions that we might understand differently today but in the first century would've been attributed to demons.

We also talk about demons in people's lives which don't refer to disembodied spirits. I preached a funeral for someone who had a lifelong struggle with alcohol. He was drinking and driving and he ran off the edge of a cliff and was killed instantly. As I was meeting with family and friends before the funeral to put together the eulogy, they talked about how he struggled with demons his whole life and he never was able to overcome the demon of alcoholism. Did they mean a disembodied spirit? No, they meant the kind of spirits which come in a bottle but that is how we talk about things that we get addicted to and lead us toward a path of self-destruction.

At the very least, demons are those things which lead us towards self-destruction or destroying other people. They lead us down a path which leads to darkness. Whether it is an addiction like drugs or alcohol or the kind of thinking which leads us to seek revenge against someone else at all costs, this can become a demon possession. We can't seem to stop that whispering in our head to do this thing that will bring pain and then we end up doing it thinking that it will bring relief. All of those things would represent demonic forces in our lives.

This last week we have all followed the news story of Christopher Dorner, the former Los Angeles policeman who went on a rampage. Dorner allegedly killed three other people before Tuesday's shootout, including the daughter of a former Los Angeles police captain. Dorner was fired from the Los Angeles police in 2008 for what officials say was falsely accusing a fellow officer of kicking a suspect in the face. He wrote in a long online manifesto last week that he would wage "unconventional" warfare on the L.A. police until they stated what he said was the truth about why he was fired. Several newspapers talked about how he was a man "possessed."

Somewhere there were voices that he was hearing which led him to do these horrible acts, leaving several people dead and families mourning. I am not saying that these were disembodied spirits or demons, but somewhere in there a thought process developed that said life would be better for him if he killed the people. Several of the family members talked about going through a, "living hell." Whether or not he was possessed by a demon spirit, he clearly had thoughts that

we would label demonic and or horrific, especially since he followed through on them.

Last year a GE executive named Hemy Neuman worked with a woman that he fell in love with. He had an obsession and he got it in his head that he was supposed to kill her husband. During the trial, Neuman's attorneys said that he was visited by an angel whose voice sounded like that of singer Olivia Newton-John and a demon whose voice was similar to singer Barry White's. While the demon encouraged Neuman to commit suicide, the angel told Neuman that Rusty Sneiderman's children were his and that he needed to protect them by killing Rusty Sneiderman, his attorneys said. I don't know if he has a mental illness or some sort of demon came to him that looked like Olivia Newton John or if he is just making it up so he can be found not guilty by reason of insanity (not demon possession.)

I would argue that most of us hear voices like this sometimes. We hear voices in our heads that say something like, "If I only had her instead of my wife, then I would be happy. And there won't be any bad consequences that come from it. It will all work out just fine." Or we hear a voice that says, "If I could just get even with that person, then I would be happy." Sometimes the voices speaking to our own hearts say, "You are worthless. You're nobody. Why don't you just give it up now? Why don't you just end it all today?"

Which of us hasn't had some voice that we know we don't want to act on speak to us in some way? All of us have experienced that, it is just that most of us don't act on it or listen to those voices.

We talked last week about how there are two voices we can listen to in our head. One is that voice that leads us to destruction. The other is the voice of the Lord which calls us and beckons us to follow him because we were made by God to be loved by God. That voice says, "I love you and you have sacred worth and value. This is the way that leads to life." We remember what Jesus said:

SLIDE *"The thief comes to steal and to kill and to destroy, but I came that you might have life and have it abundantly."*

We have to decide every day which voice we will listen to.

I don't want to completely rule out the idea of disembodied spirits which are demons which can sometimes plague us. The first reason that I don't want to dismiss that is because we find it in the Scripture. We see places in the Scripture

where a demon speaks and we could call that multiple personalities or schizophrenia or something else, but I'm not quite prepared to simply wipe it off as some form of mental illness.

The reality is that I have had experiences with the demonic as a pastor, working with persons who have felt like they are possessed. On three different occasions I have met with persons who felt that they were plagued with demons. One of them was a young man in Colorado Springs who had grown up in a cult as a child and youth. He began coming to our church and found new life in Jesus Christ but he would have terrible nightmares as well as experiences during the day when he was wide awake. The first thing that we did was make sure this young man had a really good counselor. It was not clear if this was a spiritual entity that he was experiencing or the results of trauma from this past or a combination of both.

We also approached it from a spiritual perspective and we looked at his experience as if there was a demon that was troubling him. There was a team of us working with him that included Stephen Ministers and we reminded him of the gospel stories that had to do with demons. What you find every single time that Jesus is in contact with the demon that speaks to them is that the demons are terrified of Jesus. Jesus goes to the man among the tombs at the other side of the Sea of Galilee and finds someone who has been chained up by the townspeople because they were terrified of him. He lived among the tombs by himself and when Jesus spoke to him and asked him his name the man said, "My name is Legion because we are many."

There were many demons inside this man and they begged for mercy from Jesus even though there was a Legion of them. I reminded him that in the Scriptures it wasn't even a fair fight between Jesus and the demons. Jesus has infinite strength and power compared to the forces of darkness and we wanted to remind him of that every night before he went to bed. We gave him a list of each of those stories and he would read them each night before he went to bed and in the morning when he got up. He remembered that the one who is his Lord whose spirit lives in you is infinitely greater and the demons shudder and shake when they think of his name. What we find in the gospel stories is that the forces of darkness are terrified of Jesus.

We also encouraged him to talk to the Lord every night and simply say, "Jesus, I belong to you. Hold me and help me to sleep tonight. Help me not to be

afraid because I know you won't let me go. I am yours." One of the Stephen Ministers looked at this man during these moments we spent with him and said at one point, "And for added measure I want you to say directly to those demons when they approach, 'In the name of Jesus Christ who is more powerful than you are, be gone!'"

Our team anointed this man with oil at a healing service that we did every Tuesday night. We prayed that he would sense God's loving presence and that he was embraced by Christ. We prayed that the Holy Spirit would help him know that he wasn't alone in that Jesus was walking with him through those moments that felt so dark. And at the end of the prayer we prayed, "Demon, if you are anywhere near here then you better leave right now because Jesus Christ is more powerful than you are and this man belongs to him."

In all of the cases that we dealt with and that I have seen those persons never experienced those demons again. The accommodation of prayer and good therapy and sometimes necessary medically prescribed drugs kept those demons away.

Was it demon possession? Was it something psychological? Was it something spiritual? I'm not sure which of those did the trick but I do know that when we invoke the name of Jesus Christ and they got professional help, it stopped. I find that I need to do this in my own life sometimes. You might think that I don't but there are times when I hear a voice telling me to do this or that which I know is destructive, and I simply say, "It's time you shut up and go find a new place to live demon. In the name of Jesus Christ you need to leave because I belong to him and not you." The voice always stops and I find the strength to do this thing that I know Jesus Christ wants me to do.

I want to close by looking at one of my favorite healing stories in Mark chapter 2. We find that when Jesus goes to Capernaum he not only cast out demons in a synagogue but he shows up in a house that can hold maybe 50 people and it is jam-packed. Jesus is teaching and they are spilling out into the courtyard.

There is a man in town who is paralyzed. His friends believe that if they can only get him to Jesus then he will be healed. These four friends each grab a corner of the man's stretcher and they take him to the house that may have been Simon's house. The crowds are so big they can't even get close enough and so

they get an idea. In those days the roof of a house would have been like a patio and so they took the stairs up to the roof. The roof was made of mud and one of them had the brilliant idea to rip Peter's roof off and lower their friend down. Mark tells us they were digging into the roof and you can imagine that as Jesus is teaching there is dust falling on top of his head.

The crowd is looking up and they begin to see daylight as the last layer of the roof is torn off. I can see Peter yelling at them because he didn't buy homeowners insurance that year, "What do you think you're doing?"

I picture Jesus smiling at Peter and telling them not to worry because he can take care of the roof later. A dream comes across his face as they lowered the man in front of Jesus and on the floor next to them. Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us the same thing, that Jesus, "seeing their faith," said to the man, "your sins are forgiven. Get up, pick up your mat and walk."

It is interesting that it wasn't the man's faith in this case that got the attention of Jesus. It was the faith of his friends who brought him on a stretcher and ripped off the roof. Because of their faith Jesus healed the man. Where would this man have been if he did not have four friends who are so determined that he would see Jesus that they would rip off the roof in order to get him there? This is a whole sermon by itself, but let me ask you this question.

SLIDE Who are your 4 stretcher bearers?

Do you have four friends who you could call at two in the morning and they would come to your aid and would stand with you through thick and thin? We all need them. I am guessing at least half of you don't have them. The way that you have them is that you become a stretcher bearer for someone else. You invest in other people. You show up when nobody else shows up and they are in the hospital. You mow their lawn or shovel their sidewalks when they are down and they can't get out. You show an interest in them and you care for them and over time you will become a stretcher bearer for them and they will be there for you.

This is why we urge you to be involved in a small group here at First United Methodist Church. We are supposed to be each other's stretcher bearers. If you find that you're in a place in life or you don't have any, then I hope you will contact Cherie Cobb and let us help you find a group to connect with.

The reality is that sometimes you don't have enough faith to come before God because you are worn out, and that is where your friends come in. Sometimes it is their faith which can inspire you.

SLIDE Jesus had compassion on the sick and hurting.

In every one of the Gospels we find that Jesus stops and he heals the sick. He has compassion for them and he cares for them. He is constantly involved with people who are struggling and suffering. People who are blind, lame, can't talk, can't hear, can't see or whatever it is becoming healed through Jesus Christ in the story of the gospel. Ultimately, Jesus even raises three different people from the dead. He has power to do this and he has compassion for those who are sick.

When you are sick, you need to know that God is interested in you. He has concern and compassion for you because that is the kind of God that we serve.

Another thing to notice in this story is that this man's problem wasn't with his spinal cord but with his heart.

SLIDE Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven."

This man was paralyzed because he was overcome by guilt or some other feeling which had trapped him on a stretcher. I've seen this happen before. I once met with a man who got in a fight with his teenage son one morning and later on that day the young man committed suicide. The last words he ever had with his son were words of conflict and the man was sure that it was that fight which caused his son to take his own life.

The reality is that this young man's suicide wasn't caused by the conflict, but the man could not be convinced of it. For years he carried the guilt of that conversation and it paralyzed him. He was overwhelmed and emotionally, spiritually paralyzed by what happened in that conversation until finally he was able to trust in the grace of Christ and hear the words, "Your sins are forgiven. Get up and walk."

As we close, let me remind you that Jesus is more powerful than the demons and the forces of darkness. Jesus is calling us to listen to his voice. We recognize there are things which all press us and bind us and he is able to set us free from those chains, whether it is drugs, alcohol, gambling, pornography, dark thoughts or a past regret, Jesus can break us free from those things.

We also recognize that Jesus cares for the sick and what that means for us today is that if we are following Jesus, then we are in the business of helping people who are hurting to find healing and deliverance from things that oppressed them. Our task is to be agents of healing in this world.

When we send you on a mission trip to Africa or to Guatemala and you are taking medical supplies, you become followers of Christ and you literally become the presence of Christ because you are bringing healing to people who wouldn't have access to it otherwise. When God works in the world he works primarily through people in ways that are not always supernatural. It is still miraculous for many of those who receive the gift of medical care from you.

But if Jesus healed everyone, every time we had a need whenever we prayed and he just fixed it then we wouldn't have the need for hospitals or doctors or nurses or anything else. If you apply that to everything else in life like food then you wouldn't have to have farmers, because you could just sit down at your mealtime and say, "Lord, feed me," and that food would show up when you open your eyes. Instead, we work and we become the agents for which God answers prayers.

Those of you who are doctors and nurses and therapists and in the healing professions, you have answered a high calling. You are using your gifts to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. I know that sometimes you get tired and burned out and worn-out, especially in dealing with paperwork or insurance companies, but I want you to remember today your calling. You are following Jesus and people are coming to you today just like they came to Jesus looking for healing. You are setting them free. What an amazing calling that you have and what an amazing gift that you share.

The reality is that we are all called to do this. We are all called to be stretcher bearers. There is somebody right now at your workplace who needs someone to come alongside of them and say, "Hey, I'm with you. I'm standing by you. Don't be afraid." There is somebody waiting for you to show up at the hospital or shovel their driveway or mow their yard. There are people who need you to speak into their lives and say, "Listen, you are listening to the wrong voice. You can be free in Jesus. He can help you and I want to help you. I want to stand with you as you go to AA or Celebrate Recovery."

I want to end by having you hear from one of those persons who have felt that calling in this congregation and has become one of our Congregational Care Ministers. We have a number of folks who serve as Stephen Ministers and Congregational Care Ministers and hospital visitors and they are part of our caring ministry as we seek to be the presence of Jesus Christ the world. Sandy Turner has agreed to join me and speak a bit about this ministry.

SLIDE Congregational Care Ministries

- What is Congregational Care?
- Why do we need it?
- What does it look like?
- How can the congregation help?
- How have you experienced care?

We are all commissioned to be the presence of Christ in the world and Christ works through us. Today we are going to invite you to come to one of four different stations in the four corners of the room. We will have our Congregational Care Ministers and Stephen Ministers present to anoint you with oil and pray for you. The Bible tells us in the book of James that if anyone is sick have the leaders in the church come and anoint them with oil and lift them up with a prayer of faith. We'll pray for deliverance from the demons that might plague some of you.

When I visit someone in the hospital and I pray for healing, I have told you before that this is how I pray. First, we pray that God will work through the doctors and nurses and those giving them care. I pray that God will use the medicine to help heal their bodies. I pray for those who'll come around his family or friends and support them and be their stretcher bearers. I pray that your body will work the way it is supposed to work and the antibodies within you will help bring about healing. I pray that the Holy Spirit will fill you and surround you and that God will do a grand slam, out of the park, home run miracle and deliver you. I don't care how God heals so I pray for all of those things.

Then, if you don't get the exact kind of healing that you are hoping for, I pray that God will use your sickness. I will pray that you sense that God walks with you all the way to the end and to remember that the end is never really the end. What we see as the end of this life is only the beginning. No matter what happens, I pray that you know God will walk with you and carry you. We pray for

the miracle but we also recognize that God works through people. Even when it feels like God isn't giving you what you want, we pray that you recognize God is still at work in your life. That's how we pray.

Before we invite you to come forward I want to share with you one story. The last time we did a service of healing like this I had a man come forward who was hunched over and hadn't been able to walk upright or work without pain for many months because of an accident. He came forward and we prayed over him, for healing to happen in his life and in his back. He later came up to me and said, "Pastor Jeff, after you prayed over me and anointed me with oil, I've been able to work and have had no pain in my back."

Christ has the power to set you free when you are oppressed by the demonic, by those dark forces and those dark thoughts. Christ is still a healer and he works through people like us to be instruments of healing for other people. Today, I believe that some of you will be changed as you come forward and we anoint with oil and we pray for healing in your life. I want you to be bold and courageous I hope you will find one of the stations so we can anoint with oil and pray for healing. You can also come to the prayer rails and spend time there.

If you don't come forward because you don't feel like you need a prayer for healing right now, I want you to pray for those who are coming forward because we are here in this community together and we pray for each other because we are a church that prays.

At this point I invite you to put your hands on your lap and offer yourself to Christ as instruments of these healing in this prayer together. Would you pray with me?

SLIDE Prayer

Oh God, make us instruments of your healing. Set us free from the things that bind us. Help us to recognize your voice and to follow it, especially when we feel overwhelmed by darkness. Help us to say "no" to the demonic and to invoke your name to find freedom. We pray that you would bring healing in our hearts and minds and bodies this very hour. We pray that you would use us as stretcher bearers, as healers for those around us. Oh God, bring freedom, deliverance and healing today, in Jesus name. Amen.

“The Healing Ministry of Jesus”

Theme: The Way – Walking In the Footsteps of Jesus

Scripture: Mark 1:21-28, 32-34

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments for MONDAY, February 25 – Read Matthew 4:12-22. Matthew set the context for much of Jesus' ministry: he left his hometown of Nazareth (a tiny farming village), and based himself in Capernaum, a larger fishing town on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Trade routes often brought Gentiles through Capernaum. Jesus healed and preached there, and called fishermen from the area as his first disciples.

- The gospel of John tells more about how Andrew and Peter came to follow Jesus (see John 1:40-42). Matthew emphasized that this was not a part-time interest; "they left their nets" wasn't so much a job change as a life change. When and how did you hear Jesus say, "Come, follow me"? How did you respond? How is your life different because of following Jesus?
- Scholar Myron Augsberger wrote of Jesus' call to "repent," "It is not first a moral change, but is first a change in the orientation of one's self. Since the development of the science of psychology, conversion is understood as a change of identification and self-image, a decision to identify our lives with Jesus Christ." In what ways can efforts to "be good" without a change in our inner identity be like putting a Band-Aid on a serious illness? What disciplines keep you committed to identifying your whole life with Jesus Christ, letting his power transform the inner springs of your being?

Prayer: *Jesus, I know what it is to 'live in the dark.' I choose to identify myself with you as Lord of my life. Shine your "great light" into my very self—and then out of me to others. Amen.*

TUESDAY, February 26 – Read Mark 1:21-34 – In Jesus' day, most of today's medical and psychological insights into human hurts weren't available. Yet nothing we know about epilepsy or mental illness would cause a person to accurately peg Jesus as "the holy one from God." This story likely gives us a peek at the cosmic conflict between good and evil. Jesus' confident teaching and healing both shook and drew people. Then, as now, people needed physical, spiritual and emotional healing.

- Commentator Stephen Short observes that the effect of Jesus' teaching and healing was to "excite wonder, but not to evoke faith." Have you ever experienced something that caused wonder in you, even if you didn't exactly "believe" it? What are the things that move you from uninvolved wonderment to life-changing faith in Jesus?
- God usually works through people trained in physical and emotional healing—but it's still God at work. What hurt do you bring to Jesus today? Are you open to whatever kind of help and healing he gives you?

Prayer: *Lord, you know even my most carefully hidden or deeply buried hurts and fears. I ask for your healing touch, and open myself to whatever means you wish to use to heal me. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY, February 27 – Read Mark 2:1-12 – Homes excavated in Capernaum show a maximum capacity for about 50 people in the 'living room.' When four friends tried to bring their sick friend to Jesus on a stretcher, the room was full. So they got creative! Most houses then had an outer staircase to the roof, which was usually made of branches and rushes lay over the roof beams and covered with dried mud. They climbed up, dug through, and laid him at Jesus' feet.

- If you had been there when a paralyzed man was, with great effort, placed at Jesus' feet, would you have been surprised when Jesus said, "Child, your sins are forgiven"? What does Jesus' choice of remedy suggest to you about his "diagnosis"? What connection(s) do you believe there might be between sins being forgiven and physical healing?

- The man would have stayed paralyzed without his four friends' energetic, creative caring. When was the last time you were able to be a "stretcher bearer" for someone else? Who has been a "stretcher bearer" for you? How determined and creative are you willing to be to bring Christ's help to someone you know who needs it?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about the well-being of my body and of my inner self. Help me to live each day in the beautiful reality of your forgiving, restoring grace. Amen.

THURSDAY, February 28 – Read Matthew 12:9-14 – Israel's religious leaders, especially the group known as Pharisees, created a hedge of strict rules around the Old Testament law. But Jesus knew God's heart. He knew that love, not rule-keeping, was at the heart of every commandment (see Matthew 22:36-40). Jesus wasn't destroying Sabbath observance, but showing what it was meant to look like.

- For many Christians, the weekend day of worship seems like any other day except for going to church. What is your "Sabbath" experience like? Have you considered using this one day a week as a time to be with family and friends more meaningfully? Might you, like Jesus, use the day to bring God's healing into your community? Ask God to help you choose one way to make your Sabbath keeping more like Jesus'.
- In today's scripture, Jesus healed the man at an unexpected time and place. Imagine the man's surprise and joy as he flexed his restored hand. Picture Jesus present at your church (he is, you know). Unexpectedly he approaches you, and you know he senses your need, your figurative "withered hand." Offer your need to Jesus. "Stretch out" your very self to him and let him make you well.

Prayer: O God, make me like Jesus as I pray John Wesley's words—to "do all the good I can, by all the means I can, in all the ways I can, in all the places I can, at all the times I can, to all the people I can, as long as ever I can." Amen.

FRIDAY, March 1 – Read Mark 5:21-34 – A desperate woman sought Jesus. He moved away, followed by a crowd, to help a synagogue leader named Jairus' sick daughter. (We'll look at that case tomorrow.) The woman's problem would be serious today, but it was worse then. Jewish law (see Leviticus 15:25-27) saw her condition as permanently "unclean," like a leper. She was forbidden to touch anyone; hence her furtive touch of Jesus' garment. But "Jesus recognized that power had gone out from him."

- What a burden of shame this woman must have carried, along with her physical issues. Many people saw ailments like hers as judgments from God (see John 9:2). How do you see yourself? Are there things in your life you'd rather keep hidden? Was Jesus being unkind when he called the healed woman forward—or was he freeing her from shame as well as from her physical disorder?
- Commentary writer William Barclay noted that the Jewish Talmud offered cures for this woman's condition like "carrying the ashes of an ostrich-egg in a linen rag in summer and a cotton rag in winter; or carrying a barley corn found in the dung of a white she-ass." Have you tried to deal with shame, guilt or other pain on your own, using various self-help "folk remedies"? How can Jesus' love reshape your efforts in more effective directions?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for letting your power flow for the fearful, forlorn woman in this story. Even when I'm afraid or ashamed, I ask you to continue healing me. Amen.

SATURDAY, March 2 – Read Mark 5:35-43 – As Mark told his story, Jesus' ministry had already met hostility from the religious authorities (see Mark 2:6, 24; 3:6, 22). With his daughter deathly ill, Jairus ("one of the synagogue leaders") laid aside any objections he might have had to Jesus' work. When messengers came saying the girl had died, Jesus encouraged Jairus, saying, "Don't be afraid; just keep trusting." He repaid the synagogue leader's trust by giving him back his daughter.

- When Jesus said the girl was "only sleeping" (verse 39), he did not mean she hadn't died. Even then, people knew well how to distinguish death from unconsciousness—professional mourners weren't called out when a person was still breathing. Jesus meant that, because he was there, her time in death would be no longer than a sleep (see also John 11:11-14). How is Jesus' power over even death a source of hope and confidence for you as you face life with all of its uncertainties?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when life is challenging, I feel you taking my hand and encouraging me to "get up." Thank you that by your grace I may live without fear of death or anything else this life may bring. I offer you my love and loyalty. Amen.

Family Activity: As a family, find stories in your Bibles where Jesus heals people. (Some examples include Mark 8:22-26; Luke

8:43-48; John 4:46-54). Discuss what these stories have in common. What differences do you see? Choose one to act out as a family, or if you prefer, draw the scenes instead. As you divide the story into smaller scenes, what do you notice or learn about Jesus? What about the people involved in the story? Maybe someone you know is in need of healing. How can you be a part of their story in a way they would feel the presence and love of Jesus? Could you decorate a card or prepare a meal? Maybe you could offer a hug or a smile. Always offer your prayers.