

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, July 21, 2024
"Making Space for God's Healing"

The Message

As I was researching for today's message and reading some of the commentaries on today's Gospel passages, I was reminded of a speech I saw years ago.

It was a woman named Claire Wineland who was giving a Ted talk.

It caught my attention back then because she was giving her speech while on oxygen.

Here's a photo of her giving the speech:



And here's a better photo:



Claire had Cystic Fibrosis, a genetic lung condition, and she passed away in 2018. But before she passed, she was actively advocating for people with chronic illnesses.

I considered sharing the entire speech with you, but it's about 6 minutes long and not all of it is relevant, so I just want to share some highlights with you.

She begins her speech by saying "when you pity people who are sick, you take away their power."

She goes on to say "I am sick. I will probably always be sick. And yet I am 100% content and happy with my life. 100%."

Her speech talks about how we can stop pitying people and start empowering people instead.

She says, "the way that our society works, we teach sick people that when they are sick, somehow, someday, they cannot be as happy as normal, healthy people."

"We teach them that their happiness, their contentment in life, their joy in life is tied to how healthy they are."

She recounts a time as a child when she was looking through a magazine and feeling sorry for herself because she was in the hospital and not having some adventure like the people in the magazine.

And then she realized that she could bring happiness to her hospital room.

She talks about making our lives beautiful, no matter our circumstances. She says, "we can make our lives into a piece of art."

She goes on to say, "we look at people who are sick and we pity them because we assume their lives must be inherently less joyous than everyone else's."

"Life is not going to stop unfolding itself to you just because you're sick."

"Or just because your life isn't how you think it's supposed to be. There's still going to be beauty."

"I have lived the kind of life that all of you spend your entire lives running from. I've been sick and dying my entire life."

"And yet, I am so proud of my life. What does that say about the way we're all living our lives?"

“We’re waiting to be healthy, we’re waiting to be wealthy, we’re waiting to find our passion, we’re waiting to find our true love *before* we actually start living!”

Claire says a bit more in her speech about life and joy and suffering, but I’ll stop here because I want to point something out.

She doesn’t mention this – in fact, she says nothing about faith – but I believe what Claire did was make space for God’s healing.

She opened herself to understanding that healing might not mean what she hoped it would mean – healing, for her, was never going to mean finding a cure for her illness.

Healing meant finding joy and contentment within the paradigm of her life story.

I am not sure if you all know this, but I have the same genetic disease that Claire had.

There are some amazing new medications out now that are about as close to a cure as someone with Cystic Fibrosis could ask for.

Claire didn’t live long enough to see that reality, but she made space for God’s healing, not on her terms, but on God’s terms.

So how do we make space for God’s healing in our own lives?

Our scripture passage today leads us to make a lot of assumptions about how Jesus healed people.

It says “the people brought their sick to him. They begged him to let them just touch his clothes, and everyone who did was healed.”

I think we automatically read that and assume that everyone was instantly cured of their ailments.

But what if, instead, they made space and opened themselves to healing in ways that go beyond anything physical?

What if we did this?

Earlier in today’s passage, Jesus recognizes that his disciples had not had a chance to eat, so he invites them to go with him so they can all rest.

Jesus invites his disciples to make space for healing – not necessarily because they were sick, but because they were exhausted and needed to care for their bodies and their souls.

I think this concept of making space for healing is difficult for people to understand, especially if they have not experienced examples of it in their own lives.

Like Claire, my Dad was sick most of his life.

He of course had different health issues than she did, but I grew up in a household in which we all knew Dad was sick, and my parents especially knew that his time here with us may be shorter than most people expect to get.

But I never, ever saw anyone in my family pity my Dad, and I never saw my Dad pity himself.

In fact, it was quite the opposite – Dad knew he was not ever going to be cured. His body was too damaged, and when multiple organs fail, it causes a snowball effect.

If you fix one thing, the other organs have already taken their beating, and in order to fix those, you have to damage something else.

Dad knew this. And yet, he modeled for me and my sister a life that left space for God's healing.

He modeled a life that wasn't about pity, but was about beauty and joy.

My parents did things together and they prioritized time together because they knew their time could be cut short at any time.

We did things as a family and we enjoyed life as best we could, and I would argue that compared to many average-income families I knew, we got to do more and take more "adventures" growing up because my parents didn't want to miss out on life.

There was no Jesus (not in the literal sense anyway) that we could go to, touch his clothes, and have my dad be "cured."

But my Dad was empowered to make space for God's healing nonetheless.

That healing didn't look like a body that was perfectly healthy.

Expecting that would have been unrealistic for my Dad, and would have just led to ongoing disappointment, or perhaps even anger toward God.

But, opening himself up and making space for *God's* healing, in whatever form that took, allowed him to view his life differently.

It allowed him to demonstrate for his children this idea that Claire mentions – that contrary to what society wants us to believe, his happiness, his contentment, and his joy was *not* tied to how healthy he was.

It was tied, instead, to the joy he created around him, and to the space he made to allow himself to be healed beyond his physical body.

I share these stories so that we can reimagine what healing means in the context of these Gospel stories.

I do believe the writers were intending to imply “curing of all ailments” when they were writing.

But if we go into life expecting that every ailment we ever have will be cured, we may end up disappointed, depressed, or angry with God.

If instead we leave our healing in God's hands, if we make space for God to share with us what healing might look like *for us*, we may receive an answer we did not expect.

Let us choose to make space for God's healing power in our lives and be open to discovering what that might mean for us, even if our physical bodies may not be able to be “cured.”

Let us seek out the little things that allow us to, as Claire said, be “100% content and happy” with our lives.

May you open yourself to the healing power of God.

May you let God help you discover what healing might mean for you.

And, may you live your life with beauty and joy.

Amen.

Let's pray:

God of compassion, teach us to follow you, to trust you, to love you, and to love as you love.

God of compassion, feed those of us who are hungry - physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Allow us to open our hearts and minds to your healing power, setting aside our own expectations and opening ourselves instead to the healing possibilities we could not even begin to imagine.

God, teach us to have compassion for others as you do. Help us to show compassion in action the way you do. Remind us when it is time to come away with you for quiet and rest.

God, in your mercy, have compassion for us.

We pray all of this in your Holy name. Amen.