

March 1, 2015

Peter

*Peter's Mother-in-Law*

Luke 4:38-44

**Opening words:** This year's Lenten sermon series is called *Peter*. I have selected him for two reasons. The first is the amount of information we have about him. The Gospels are filled with many stories about Peter. For this reason, many connect with him. The second is his transformation. Within those stories, we see his spiritual progress. He begins as a confused follower and ends as a true leader of the early church. Time does not permit us to look at all of Peter's stories, but we do have time for five. Each one happens prior to the events of Holy Week and reminds us of Jesus's divine mission.

This week we find ourselves in the fourth chapter of Luke. Chronologically, we are out of order. Last week, we looked at Peter's calling in the fifth chapter. This story may explain why Peter followed Jesus so easily. It is hard not to believe in Jesus once he has healed a family member. Our topic for today is healing and why healings are so important to our world today. Our scripture lesson for today is Luke 4:38-44. Let me call this message *Peter's Mother-in-Law*.

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**Luke 4:38-44** <sup>38</sup> Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. <sup>39</sup> So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.

<sup>40</sup> At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. <sup>41</sup> Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.

<sup>42</sup> At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. <sup>43</sup> But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." <sup>44</sup> And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

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We continue our sermon series on Peter in the fourth chapter of Luke. The order of the chapter is interesting. Never underestimate the work of a good editor. The chapter begins with Jesus's temptations. Jesus is victorious over Satan after forty days of fasting. Ready to begin his ministry, he returns to the place where success should have been easy, home. The problem is, he is rejected in Nazareth. The best answer I can give you is that relationships are complex. Undaunted, he travels forty miles to the northeast to the seaside town of Capernaum. Like Nazareth, he enters the local synagogue and begins to teach. This time the results are different.

They were amazed at his teachings and his authority. Then it gets even better. After healing a demonic, the crowd is captivated by him. For the first time, people are talking about Jesus. His healing makes him a local celebrity. It is a great story, but that would not be the last healing for the day.

The next healing came at Simon's house. When Jesus entered, he is confronted by his mother-in-law. There is nothing funny about her, she is sick. Her illness is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but only Luke, the physician, tells us she had a high fever. Jesus rebukes the fever and her temperature begins to slide back to normal. There will be no rehab for her. According to the story, immediately she got up and began to wait on them. It is a great story, but that would not be the last healing of the day.

When the Sabbath ended, about 6:00 in the afternoon, unnamed people came with their sick loved ones. Everyone who came sick or possessed walked away whole. Even the demons knew it, he was the Son of God. It all took a toll on Jesus. He was physically and spiritually spent; he tries to find a place to pray. However, there would be no rest for Jesus. The entire community of Capernaum begged him to stay, but he couldn't. Other towns needed to hear the good news about the Kingdom of God. If you like hearing about Jesus healing people, say, **"Amen!"**

It really doesn't matter, because all healing really comes from God. It doesn't matter if your health returns from a better diet, it is from God. I would encourage everyone to eat your fruits and vegetables. It doesn't matter if your health returns because of a better lifestyle, it is from God. I would encourage everyone to get a good night's sleep. It doesn't matter if your health returns from the practice of modern medicine, it is really from God. There are times when we need to have surgery or to take pills. We have a pill for everything! It doesn't matter if your health returns in some miraculous way, it is from God. The church always has and always will pray for the sick. It doesn't matter how the person is healed, because all healing really comes from God. He is the one who has put the pieces in place to make it possible. The scripture lesson for today is about miraculous healing.

In 1977, the world was informed that Kathryn Kuhlman died in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Do you remember her? She accepted Christ at the age of 14 at the Concordia Methodist Church in Missouri. Two years later, she began to preach. She experienced success. During the 1940s, she became famous for her "healing crusades." She had a weekly television show, *I Believe in Miracles*. Her identity was the gift of healing. Her believers said, she had the ability to harness the Holy Spirit on command and heal the afflicted. Her critics called her a fraud. Many local ministerial associations protested her crusades because they said she did more harm than good. I am not sure how I feel. Faith healing has always been a controversial topic.

Everyone must answer the question, do you believe in faith healing? According to a Fox News survey in 2011, 20% of Americans believe prayer has no part of healing.

They say prayer is basically a waste of time. The same report says that 3% of Americans are unsure how they feel about faith healing. I am part of the 77% of Americans who believe in faith healing. We believe that prayer does make a difference. For me it is the wrong question. The question isn't, do you believe in faith healing. The real question should be, why doesn't God heal more often? Have you ever wondered why God withholds his power?

Today, I am going to try to answer that question, why doesn't God heal more often? My thoughts are grouped around three statements. Each one can be traced back to this morning's text. Each one really deals with our relationship with Jesus. My goal is to help you have a clearer understanding of Biblical healings. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

### **The Obvious Reason**

First, Jesus healed people for the obvious reason. It is the same reason we want to heal people. We want people healed to relieve human suffering. That is what you find in the story for today. Jesus exits the synagogue and enters the home of a supporter, Simon. The Master's timing is horrible. When he arrives, he finds that Simon's mother-in-law is sick. I really do not know her illness, but her fever is high. It was an emotional reaction. Jesus saw the woman suffering and knew he had the power to stop it. He does, and the rest is history. It is called compassion. We understand that point because we are compassionate people. I was accused recently of being a poor leader because I am too compassionate. How compassionate are you?

When I was in seminary, we began every class with prayer. One day the professor asked if anyone had a prayer request. The first person who raised his hand said his brother had cancer and asked for healing. Emotion filled the room, and everyone had the license to share their prayer request. In no particular order, everyone had a prayer request. Sometimes, it was a family member. Sometimes, it was a friend. Sometimes, it was a person in their church. Sometimes, it was some story on the news that grabbed the person's attention. The professor was in no particular hurry that day, so he heard everyone's prayer request. Not one piece of academic information was covered. The only thing that mattered was prayer. Each one of us was emotionally spent. In the prayer itself, we experienced the Holy Spirit first hand. We prayed for God to eliminate the human suffering because we all had compassion on the afflicted. It doesn't just happen in seminary classrooms.

It happens every week in church. We experience it every week. The most important part of the worship service is not the announcements. We all know youth group meets on Wednesday nights at 7:00. The most important part of the service is not the prelude. However, it is always wonderful. The most important part of the service is not the message. However, I hope it does speak to you. The most important of the service is when your loved one is mentioned in prayer. Every week we pray for Robin. Every week we pray for Carol. Every week we pray for Ted and Marlene.

Every week we pray for them because we want to eliminate their suffering. The word is compassion. Jesus had compassion on Simon's mother-in-law and the rest, so he healed them. If you have an ounce of compassion in your body, say, "**Amen!**" However, Jesus didn't just heal because he had compassion. There is a reason beyond the obvious.

### **Beyond the Obvious**

The reason Jesus performed miracles was to add credibility to his teachings. Look at the story with me one more time. Jesus is in the synagogue teaching about the Kingdom of God. The congregation is impressed with his teachings. He had authority and insight. Jesus exits the service and enters Simon's home. He heals Simon's mother-in-law. That does not happen every day. How do you question the words of someone who can perform miracles? If Jesus's words do not give him credibility, then his actions did. That is why Simon instantly went with Jesus when he was invited. The healings remind us that the Kingdom of God is near. That is why we still hunger for miracles today. I have never met a single person who didn't want to feel that God was close. If you find comfort in God's presence, say, "**Amen!**" This is our cosmic dilemma: what happens when healing doesn't come? What happens when the person we pray for dies? Jesus's generation demanded miracles and wonders. Many people in our time still do.

When I was in school, I had a good friend by the name of David Glenn. His only flaw was that he came from Michigan. However, he couldn't care less about football, so he got a free pass. He was gentle and kind. He had the patience of Job. He was from the Christian Missionary Alliance Church and longed to be a pastor. That dream was threatened before I knew him. He had survived a brain tumor. His balding head exposed the scars. Every six months he would go to the Kentucky Medical Center to be evaluated. I prayed with him before the first two trips and God heard our prayers. No tumors had returned. During one of those routine examinations, something looked funny. There was nothing funny about it. The tumor had returned. The entire seminary prayed for David, but the tumor continued to grow. Over time, the tumor's effects could be seen. He walked with a limp and he talked with a slur. He missed class more often, but we continued to pray for healing. Then, we got the news. David had been hospitalized and the end was near. I went to the hospital to visit my friend and I wasn't the only one. One by one people entered the room and prayed for David's healing. I did the same. I will never forget that scene. He was unconscious, hooked up to the most modern medical technology. His wife, Char, sat by his bed stroking his forearm, with her mascara running down her face. Everyone who came believed, but after that day we believed something new. We believed the end was near. We were not wrong. David died in the middle of the week and his memorial service was held in the seminary chapel. Can I be honest with you? There is not a single day I do this job that I don't think about David. I get to live his dream, being a pastor. Occasionally, I wonder, why did I get to live and David had to die?

## The Truth

This is the truth. God always answers our prayers. The problem is, the answer is often "no". How many times have we prayed for someone who didn't improve? As a matter of fact, the worst thing happened; they died. I have many names on my list. I find it difficult to look at old church pictorial directories, because so many of those people are gone. I prayed for most of them to be healed, but it didn't happen. I am a self-critical person. I wonder, maybe they weren't healed because my faith was too weak? Many demand miraculous signs and wonders. We are always demanding a healing.

Then I remember what Jesus said. You remember the story. We looked at it several weeks ago. Jesus is proving to Thomas that he had been resurrected. The disciple received his proof and believed. Jesus responds with these words, "*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" That quote, and others like it, changed everything. The question is not, if our loved one will be healed? The question is, will we believe if they are not healed? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Will you pray with me?