



Advent I - December 2, 2012
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

*The God Who Heals:
How He Wants*
John 4:46-54

I want you to meet a member of my family. This is my mom's brother, Uncle Clayton. *[Photo]* You've never met him, and I don't talk much about him because I've never met him, either. He collapsed and died in his school gymnasium when he was 17 years old. I don't think the doctors ever really figured out what took him. He just died. And my grandparents never got over it. They both lived long, fulfilling lives and yet, to the end, their eyes would moisten when they talked to me about Clayton.

This is every parent's worst nightmare, isn't it? But some of us have lived that nightmare. You don't have to, of course, but if you care to—if you've ever lost a child or a grandchild—raise your hand. It is the most unnatural thing in the world, isn't it, to bury your child? And I know that every one of you, if you had any warning at all, did everything within your power—and would have done anything—to save your child. All parents, but you particularly, will understand the heart and passion of the man we meet in this morning's story. *[Read John 4:46-54]*

Healing was an important part of Jesus' earthly ministry. We have something like 40 different accounts of Jesus' miraculous healings. John includes just three healings in his gospel, and they are unique to his gospel. This Advent, we are going to talk about *The God Who Heals*.

Now you might say, "That's an odd Christmas theme, isn't it? Why preach on healing in December?" I'll give you three reasons. First, it's what comes next in John, and we are marching our way through this gospel. Second, this topic—healing—is one of two things that your elders have focused a lot of attention on recently. Your Session wants to be clear about what we believe as a church on the topic of healing. Inside your bulletin you will find a draft of their work. I would urge you to keep this in your Bible and study it. (And, by the way, thank God that you have elders who are really the spiritual leaders of this congregation!)

The third reason to tackle this topic in Advent is this: Why not? The story of Christmas is the story of God who came to earth on a rescue mission to save his sin-sick world. Jesus' mission was, at its core, a healing mission... healing of all types: physical, spiritual, emotional and relational. And we believe that Jesus is still in the healing business today. I know, that may not sound like your

grandmother's Presbyterian church. But if this is true, we want to be part of what God is doing, don't you?

So, in a nutshell, here's what we believe about healing: God still heals. And because God is God, God heals how he wants, whom he wants, when he wants and he does it to his glory. If you believe that the days of miraculous healing are over, we believe the Bible teaches otherwise. If you believe that healing is a magic formula—that if you pronounce the right words in the right way, God has no choice but to obey you—we believe the Bible teaches otherwise. Does God heal miraculously and instantaneously? Yes. Does God heal through physicians and counseling and support groups and hard work? Yes. We want to be a place of healing. We want Christmas to be a time of healing. So this Advent we will talk about *The God Who Heals*.

So, where does this story take place? In Cana, where Jesus performed his first miracle, the changing of water into wine. I don't know why John was so interested in this village, but he is the only gospel writer to even mention it, and he does so in his first two miracle stories. While in Cana, Jesus receives a visitor from Capernaum, a town on the shore of Galilee. This man is described as an "official." Commentators believe he might have been a Roman official, perhaps an army officer, which means that he was a Gentile.

In chapter 3, Jesus ministered to Nicodemus, a respected Jewish leader. In chapter 4, Jesus ministered to a Samaritan woman. And here, Jesus ministers to a Gentile. In these three stories, John illustrates that God loved the whole world: Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. He wants us to love His whole world, too!

Capernaum is about 20 miles from Cana. And because the Sea of Galilee sits in a rift 700 feet below sea level, it is quite a climb from Capernaum to Cana, but it didn't matter. This man's boy was dying; he would have done anything to save him. Did this mean that he was a believer in Jesus? Nope. His boy was dying. He would have done anything to save him, even walk 20 miles to find a strange country rabbi who was reputed to have healing powers. Maybe it was wild goose chase, but his boy was dying. He would have done anything.

But how easy was it for this respected Gentile leader to climb that dusty road toward a tiny Jewish village and ask for help from a Galilean preacher who was known as a rabble-rouser? Just imagine the scene: huge crowds gathered around Jesus, and suddenly appears this officer in flowing robes wearing the insignias of his office. How easy was it for this proud, noble official to make that dusty, humble walk? Probably not easy at all. Why did he do it? Because, his boy was dying; he would have done anything to save him.

I wonder, is there anyone in this congregation who hasn't received healing from Jesus because they are too proud to ask for help? Too proud to walk up our stairs?

Too proud to sit in our waiting room and wait for a counselor? After all, we have a reputation to maintain, don't we? We could never admit to our fellow Chapel Hillians that we actually have stuff that needs healing, could we? What would people say if they knew we needed help? That our bodies needed healing or our marriages or relationships or spirits needed healing?

Lance Brown tells me there are folks from our church who travel to Olympia for Celebrate Recovery rather than be seen here on Thursday nights, because they dare not admit they need healing. It's too bad, because we work hard to make Chapel Hill a safe and confidential place. Still, people are so afraid to make that walk because of how they might be perceived. Look to the person to your left; now your right. Would you be shocked to discover that person needs healing? How about the person in front of you? How about the person who is preaching to you?

A few weeks back, Cyndi and I were in a bleak place. I was struggling with my sense of call, struggling with health issues, with family issues, with legal issues, with church issues. It was one of the lowest points of our life together. We were at a conference and saw Os Guinness and shared some of this with him. He said, "I think this is spiritual attack. You need to call together your intercessors and pray for victory and healing." Hmmm... what a clever idea! To consider the possibility that we were under spiritual attack and needed spiritual intervention! You might have thought that idea would have come to me on my own, but no, pastors don't need that kind of help, right? We have it all together; all figured out. Right?

But I didn't—we didn't—and I was feeling depressed and discouraged and sleepless and anxious. So, when we got home, I spoke to some of our elders and said, "We need prayer. Will you come and do battle for us?" So one Wednesday night after Financial Peace University, I made the long climb from Capernaum to Cana, knelt down in a room next to my wife—holding tightly to her, leaning on her—and let Jesus minister to us through his servants. It was transformative. If you know Cyndi, you know she's a pretty down to earth girl. Cyndi said that during that prayer time, it felt as if a literal weight had been lifted off of me. She felt me get lighter, and that night—for the first time in years—I slept for eight straight hours.

We needed healing, and we chose not to let my position, my office, my "reputation" prevent us from getting the healing that only Jesus could provide. I wonder how many here this morning are not receiving the healing that Jesus wants to give you, because you are too proud—too protective of your reputation—to admit that you need help? So, how's that working for you?

After making such a long and perhaps embarrassing journey, Jesus doesn't exactly greet the guy warmly, does he? "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders you will never believe." That is not very welcoming! Perhaps what Jesus is lamenting is, "You want the miracles, but you don't want the miracle worker. You want what I can do for you, but you don't want me?" Again, how

close to home does that strike us? We want what Jesus can do for us—his blessing, his healing—but the thing he longs most to give to us—Himself—we aren't that interested in!

But the dad isn't stymied by this mild rebuke. With a persistence that Jesus always seemed to admire, he just comes right back at him. "Please, come with me! Please, make the 20-mile journey, so that you can see my son and touch him and heal him!" And Jesus replies, "It isn't necessary. I can heal him from right here. In fact, it's done. He is well." And with that word, the boy was healed... long distance. And here we discover another healing principle. Our sovereign God can heal any way He wants to: sometimes at the touch of a praying servant; sometimes from afar. Sometimes instantaneously, sometimes over years. Sometimes with no medical intervention, sometimes through the skills of physicians. Sometimes in the quiet of your own prayer life, sometimes in a LifeGroup or a step group or a counseling office.

And notice the result of that healing not just a restored body. It was a spiritually restored family. John tells us that all of the man's household believed in Jesus. Healing is never just for the purpose of making a body, mind or spirit whole. The ultimate purpose of Christ's healing is always that we would know, believe, love and trust him more than ever we have before.

The very first affirmation in our document is this: God is sovereign. He heals His people by whatever means and in whatever time He chooses. Jesus healed by touching, speaking, praying, spitting, rubbing and casting out demons. He healed up close and far away. He healed instantly and over time. He healed some, yet many others remained unhealed for reasons known only to our sovereign God. But if it is true that our God still heals—the way he wants to and when he wants to—then we should be cautious of any formula, any magic combination of words and assumptions that someone tells us will force God's hand and compel his obedience.

And if it is true that God uses all means to heal us, why wouldn't we try everything we can to access his healing power? It's not a matter of praying for instant healing or going to a doctor or working hard in counseling for two years or praying for spiritual deliverance. It means having the courage to do all these things and trusting God to work.

There are folks here this morning who have tried a certain kind of healing technique that didn't work. There are some who prayed to Jesus for healing, felt rebuked, and stopped trying. And there are some who are so proud of their reputation that they refuse to seek the help that might lead them to healing. Yet we have a God who says, "I heal. I can heal you. I want you to ask and not stop asking; I want you to humble yourself and let me do my work in you. I want you to share your need with your church community so that they can be part of and

blessed by my work in your life. I want these things for you. Will you receive them?"

How about this morning? Communion is one way that God heals spirit, mind, body and relationships. And, after you have received the sacrament, if you have any need for healing—physical, relational, emotional, spiritual—turn around and let us anoint you and pronounce Christ's healing upon your life! If you are a couple, you might want to be anointed together. Aren't you glad that we serve a living and powerful Jesus who is still in the healing business. Come, and receive your healing today.

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. The Advent sermon theme is "The God Who Heals." Is that a strange Christmas theme? Why or why not?
 2. Can you remember a time when your child or grandchild was in serious condition? Describe your emotions. What was the royal official risking in his decision to ask Jesus for help?
 3. Do you believe that God still heals miraculously today? Some believe that it requires a certain "formula" to persuade God to help. What does this story teach about God's sovereignty in healing?
 4. Pray for specific healing for each other.