

“Healing”

Sermon – June 7, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church

Miracles. The four Gospels explicitly record 37 distinct miracles performed by Jesus during his earthly ministry with 20 of them mentioned in more than one gospel.

These supernatural acts are generally categorized into four main types:

1. Raising the Dead: We think of Lazarus, of course, but also raising the daughter of a synagogue leader, which we heard in today’s gospel lesson.
2. Exorcisms: That is, driving out evil spirits, such as casting demons into a herd of pigs.
3. Miracles Over Nature: Things like turning water into wine and calming the storm.
4. Healings: We think of curing the blind and also healing the sick as we heard in today’s gospel lesson with the woman who was hemorrhaging for 12 years.

Of the 37 miracles, raising the dead accounts for 3 of them, exorcisms 4 of them, nature 9 of them, and healings 21! And, really, except the 4 nature ones, the other 33 all restored people to life in some way—about 90% of the miracles.

People often think Jesus performed miracles to prove his divinity, that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. He also did them, though, as a snapshot of heaven invading Earth. By healing sickness, casting out evil, and overcoming death, Jesus showed what the world looks like under God's perfect rule, where suffering does not exist.

And while we cannot perform miracles as Jesus did, we can imitate a key characteristic of Jesus for performing miracles and that is to show compassion. Jesus never performed miracles as a theatrical show. Many accounts explicitly state he was “moved with compassion” by

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human suffering, driving him to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and comfort the grieving.

Today’s lectionary passage from Matthew 9 mirrors similar stories in Mark 5 and Luke 8, though some details vary. Arguably, all three vignettes in today’s gospel lesson are about healing and restoring to life.

We begin with Jesus calling Matthew, a tax collector. As you have heard on multiple occasions, tax collectors were despised and that is for several reasons.

One is that they were more like Mafia “wise guys” that shook down people on behalf of the Romans, but adding a hefty cut for themselves. That was compounded by the fact that generally they were fellow Jews. And so, they were viewed as, traitors, collaborators similar to Vichy French with the Germans in the Second World War. And by continually interacting with the non-Jewish—Gentile—Romans, the tax collectors were also ritually unclean.

It's hard for us to feel that level of antipathy in our gut, though our current bipolar political dysfunction unfortunately makes it easier to see.

And then to break bread with them was unconscionable.

And yet, when Jesus said to Matthew, “Follow me”, Matthew got up and followed him. Why? And why did the tax collectors want to dine with Jesus anyway?

Because they were despised outcasts. They may have been comparatively wealthy compared to the average peasant, but they were totally isolated socially and religiously from the community with really no way to reverse that.

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Jesus, though, offered them unconditional dignity, forgiveness, and spiritual hope. He offered them a chance to be healed in mind and spirit as a physician heals the body.

Because here’s the thing: in none of the Gospel accounts did Jesus ever scold, yell at, or condemn people who were struggling with moral failures, lifestyle sins, or brokenness. He empathized with them; he had compassion for them.

Now, admittedly, it is easier to have compassion for those in need and are grateful for assistance. It’s another when they are in need and think you owe them because you’re better off. Still, saying, “Compassion is foolish because you might get burned” is countered by “With no compassion, people suffer.”

The next vignette is a leader of the synagogue, call Jarius in Mark and Luke, seeking Jesus to save his daughter. If you’re a cynic, you might think this guy as a religious leader is a hypocrite who criticizes Jesus publicly but when in his hour of need comes to him. But the text does not indicate that. After all, Jesus is at table with many other people, so it’s pretty public.

And the leader appears to have complete faith in Jesus: “Lay your hand on her and she will live,” he says. And how does Jesus respond? Does he ask, “Do you believe in me?” or “What doctrines do you subscribe to?” No, Jesus says nothing. He simply gets up and follows him.

When they get to the house, after clearing everyone else out, Jesus takes the girl by the hand and she gets up to the astonishment of all.

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Yes, on one hand you could argue he wants to demonstrate his power to show he comes from God, since the news quickly spreads throughout the region.

Yet, he makes no spectacle about it all, no preconditions, no post event interviews. Again, Jesus has compassion and it doesn't really matter whether it's for the man or his daughter or both.

Finally, we have the woman suffering from chronic bleeding who stands at the opposite end of the social spectrum. The synagogue leader is prominent, while the woman is unnamed and ostracized. The synagogue leader is confident enough in himself to walk directly up to Jesus, while the woman lives in a state of shame and desires to move unnoticed. For both people, Jesus responds with equal compassion.

Because she was a *woman*, was ritually unclean, and reached out to touch Jesus' cloak, when he turned around Jesus would have been fully within his rights to chastise and berate her.

Instead, he tells her, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well. And she was cured at that very moment.”

We say “made well” or “cured” but it's the same Greek word, *sózó*, which is also translated as “save” or “rescue”, either literally or figuratively.

And she has been “saved” or “healed”, not just physically but also socially. She can now be a member of the community again as she is no longer “unclean.”

The stories of Matthew's call and Jesus's healing acts emphasize restorative mercy. This mercy is not simply words, not just words of forgiveness or absolution, but tangible acts of restoration that show what the kingdom of God ought to be like.

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The Pharisees emphasized purity and sacrifice, but Jesus reorients the discussion toward mercy, toward healing, toward relationship.

Love and restoration happen through inclusion, not exclusion. A person is not cast out for past failures but invited to walk a new path

The call from Jesus is action-oriented, for it requires us to live now as if the rule and reign of God had come upon us in its fullness.

We may not be able to perform miracles in the way Jesus did, but God has blessed us with the means to heal people with modern healthcare, limited only by the systemic constraints we impose, which we can change through compassion.

And compassion extends to those hurting whether from personal challenges or as a group from societal prejudices and persecutions. We are called to help individuals but also to help heal society from its fear and hatred of those who are “different”, who are the “other”, through love and empathy.

As Jesus told the Pharisees, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifices’.”

Or as German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God’s will.” And that’s what it means to follow Jesus. So, let’s do it.

In the name of God the Creator; God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.
Amen.