

## Healing and Preaching, Preaching and Healing

By Reverend Katie Hambrick Suddeth

When was the first time you had a spiritual encounter with healing?

\*pause\*

It doesn't have to be a physical healing. It could be an emotional, psychological, spiritual, any kind of healing- I mean a moment where you completely felt yourself wrapped up in divine love- almost like wrapping up in a blanket after coming inside from being out in the cold- a moment in which things made more sense and your hope was just a little bit brighter.

*Pause: Did a specific memory or moment pop up for you? Maybe a couple?*

I have had many moments through my short 30 years, where I know I have had this feeling come up. Moments where all the sudden the peace beyond all understanding came over me and it was well with my soul. A moment in which I felt whole. Completely whole. One of those moments was when my mom and I were battling illness at the same time.

My mom had just had surgery to remove the last bits of cancer from her throat. I had a deadly virus that made me bedridden. We weren't allowed to see each other because they didn't want my mom to get the virus since her immune system was compromised from the cancer treatments and plus she was in bed post surgery. No one was supposed to get too close, but my sister decided she didn't care. My sister, who is four years younger than me, stayed home from school to take care of my mom and I. I couldn't eat or drink anything and I just remember being miserable- half aware of what was going on, but when I was awake and aware, I remember my little sister- stroking my hair and pinning it back out of my face. She would talk to me even though I couldn't talk. I remember her

adjusting my pillows to fit and give what comfort she could to the areas in which my body was swollen. I remember her and I attempting to get my swollen bulking body to the bathroom and back- I remember her cleaning me and the mess when we didn't make it. She would turn on my tv when my favorite shows came on- even if i couldn't open my eyes to watch it- just incase. She is doing all of this for me, while also taking care of my mom. I was 17- she was 13.

The ultimate moment that I felt the divine interaction with healing is when my fever started to finally break and I was crying in pain and my sister was there- Turning on fans, bringing me wash cold clothes, and rubbing my back gently as you could see the knots in my spine at that point and she was afraid to hurt me.

The next day- it was a lovely Georgia spring day. I finally started to feel a little better. Swelling had gone down and no fever. My mom was up. We couldn't talk but we were writing notes. And we all decided to go sit on the back porch, enjoy the weather, and eat ice cream- as my mom and I were finally hungry. That moment on that porch changed me. I felt whole. I felt wrapped up in love. I felt like my hope had been restored. That was a moment when I couldn't be who I was before and turned the direction of where I was going.

Life is full of moments of death and resurrection. Divine moments where we feel destroyed- only to come out the other side a refreshed version of ourselves. These moments can be physical as in my story, or emotional, spiritual, psychological... It can be when the person you love dies. It can be when a person you trust betrays you. It can be when you betray yourself. These are when little parts of what we thought about life or

ourselves die to make way for healing and growth so that if we choose to, we can live more fully into who God has dreamed for us to be.

In today's scripture, we see that very same thing happen. Peter's mother in law is ill with a fever. Jesus comes to her and heals her. What is her response to this? She starts serving the men in her house. It would be wrong of us to interpret her behavior as merely her doing a womanly duty and serving men as social structures of the time would dictate.

She just received the gift of healing. She has had a personal encounter with healing- not only was the encounter with healing, but the healing came from Jesus. She has had an encounter with the divine. She responds to that gift by getting up and serving others. She becomes the first person to follow Jesus' messianic ministry- she becomes his first servant and joins him in the radical announcement with her actions that the kingdom of god is near. She becomes the first deacon.

Deacon can mean many different things based on which denomination of Christianity or religion you are a part of . In our context, the role of deacon is to help minister and care for our church family. We have a board of deacons, who serve our community faithfully. They feel called to serve and care for our church family- and we are all better for their leadership and care.

The other unique thing about being baptist is we believe in the priesthood of all believers. This means that we are all called to minister and care for each other. We are called to minister and care for people in this community and beyond- everyone. When you decide to follow the path of love and liberation that Jesus sets before us, you are accepting the call to love and part of accepting that call in baptist life is accepting the call to serve others-

to show God's love to others.

To be a minister to all.

To follow in the footsteps of Peter's mother in law and be a deacon.

When we follow the path that Jesus has set before us of love and liberation, we receive the healing of being able to live in a new way. A new way of life is offered to us. This way of life is living in love and leading with compassion. Healing does not mean perfect or that you will feel great or life will be great. It doesn't mean you won't go through cycles, changes, and doubt. Healing is a process. The process of healing is leading us to being made whole- to wholeness. The healing is a gift of faith and through that gift we receive things like the fruits of the spirit.

This healing does us no good when we keep it to ourselves. Do you remember the parable in which a master is going out of town for a while and he gives money to three different people who worked for him for safe keeping while he is gone? In brief, while the master is gone, the first and second workers invest the money and make more money, so when the master returns they are praised for their investments. The third worker buries the money in a hole. The master scolds this worker for being selfish and stingy.

This parable is a metaphor for discipleship. Our healing and restoration is no good to us if we keep it to ourselves. The master is away and we are meant to invest in people. We are the hands and feet that god has to go about spreading good. We are God's lips on earth to spread words of hope and love. We are to get up after being healed ourselves and serve others just as Peter's mother in law did. Your life should become the sermon you are preaching. \*PAUSE\*

This is our call- healing and preaching; preaching and healing.  
Because that is the model we see time and time again set for us by Jesus.  
The truth is we are the only “jesus” some people will ever meet. \*PAUSE\*  
You might be the only person to show the love of god to someone.

When I was a teenager, I was a good kid, but I really wanted to be accepted by who I thought were the cool kids. The good news for me is I never happened to be with them when they did things that got them in trouble. However, I did adopt the same attitude as them. I let my grades slip... like not slip a little bit but slip a lot. I would get a bathroom pass and go hang out with them in the cafeteria instead of being in class. I really just focused on doing what it took to be accepted by this group. It was not a good road I was heading down.

When I got sick, it was a wake up call for me. But if i'm honest, I don't think the sick part was the wake up call. During that time I was trying to be cool, I was really mean to my little sister, yet when I got sick, she showed me unconditional love. She took care of me. Her actions of serving me even when i didn't deserve it-  
her helping me heal-  
Her love-

That was my wake up call. Her love led to a feeling of wholeness in me that changed how I viewed myself and others.

May we all realize the power of our actions.

May we all be empowered to not be stingy with God's love and healing,  
But to share it so generously.

May we allow God's path of love and liberation to heal us to wholeness-

May we follow in the footsteps of Peter's mother in law- allowing our

actions and lives become a living sermon and testimony of the goodness of god. Amen.