

**St. Andrew's Cathedral**  
Jackson, Mississippi  
Sermon for July 22, 2018 ~ Proper 11B  
The Very Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

The ministry of Jesus Christ was a ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. In his teaching he expanded the thinking of his hearers by explaining how the Hebrew Scriptures foretold a Messianic age when God's reign would prevail over all people. In his preaching, he transformed the lives of his hearers by delivering good news of God's vision for a redeemed and restored creation. And in his healing, he gave his hearers tangible signs of the presence and power of God's reign and God's realm as present realities for those who believe. He sent his disciples out on a mission to teach, preach, and heal in his Name and as he had shown them. They returned with amazing stories of how they were able to accomplish the same things he was doing among those who believed. Jesus and his followers, then and in every generation, are called, equipped, and empowered to teach, to preach, and to heal.

Today, we are focused on the spiritual dimension of healing that, for us as followers of Jesus Christ, lies at the center of it all. We know that modern medicine works wonders. We know that the hard work of reconciliation works wonders. We know that acts of compassion work wonders. But as people of faith, we do not stop there. We contend that there is a power at work in the world and in human lives that makes it all complete. It is the power of God.

People of faith engaged in a healing ministry, believing God will use our actions in ways that are beyond our comprehension, has an extraordinary impact. A person who receives such acts of compassion, believing God is involved, has greater confidence and hope for good results.

Some healing is almost instantaneous. Other healing is a lengthy process. Sometimes we receive the healing of body, mind, or soul that we are seeking. At other times, the healing that comes is not what we expected but often exactly what we needed. I've always offered healing prayer and anointing in the churches I have served. I've been privileged to witness physical healings that I can only describe as miraculous. I've also been privileged to witness spiritual healings that make physical healing insignificant. In every case, what stands out to me is the hand of God at work.

**Fred** - One Sunday, a parishioner named Fred came to the early service. He told me he'd had x-rays that showed a serious medical problem and that he was to be admitted to the hospital that afternoon for additional tests that would lead to diagnosis and treatment. He asked for and prayer and anointing.

On Tuesday of that week, Fred came to my office to report what had happened. The medical team at the hospital did another x-ray on Monday morning. Fred's physician looked at the x-ray and ordered another. After several hours, the doctor came into Fred's room and told him that the reason he ordered another set of x-rays was because he thought there had been a mistake. When the new x-rays came back, they were the same. The doctor said, "Both sets of x-rays tell us that the spots on the original x-ray are not there. I can't explain it, but there is nothing wrong with you. I'm releasing you so this bed can be used by someone who is sick." Fred believes to this day that the x-rays are evidence of the power of prayer to heal physical disease. So do I. The experience transformed his vision. He and his wife went to Mexico to work with children in an orphanage so they could bring hope, healing, and a future to them.

**Loy** - Loy was CEO of a wholly owned South American subsidiary of a major U.S. oil company. He contracted a virus and was brought by air ambulance to a hospital in the Texas Medical Center. I first

met him when I visited him in the ICU. He told me his doctor said, “Sir, you need to consider every day a blessing from God because we almost lost you.” Evidently, that got his attention because it prompted him to recall that he had intended to go to seminary after earning his undergraduate degree. Instead, he earned an advanced petroleum engineering degree and pursued a career with this energy company. Following a period of discernment, he retired from his job and entered seminary, where he graduated *suma cum laude*. He returned to Houston and served as my associate. In his case, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals were the instruments of God’s miracles. His physical body was healed and, in the process, his heart and mind were opened, leading him along a different vocational path.

**Debbie** - And, then there was Debbie. I had known her as a girl, the younger sister of one of my very best friends in high school. My friend called to tell me Debbie was dying and asked that I visit her. When I arrived at her home, I was struck by how in the photographs in the entry hall she looked so much like she did the last time I saw her, which had been at least 25 years earlier. I talked with her husband who told me how he had fallen in love with her five years before. Prior to their marriage, she told him she had the AIDS virus. He married her anyway. When I went in to visit with her, she was just a skeleton. She didn't look anything like herself. But when she spoke, I recognized the spirit in her. She spoke of her death and my role in planning her funeral in such a matter of fact way. I asked how her faith was and she said, “It's never been stronger.” I asked if she was afraid and she said, “Oh, I have a little fear from time to time, but it is not fear of death. It is fear of dying and fear for my family and my friends.” We had a prayer. I had my eyes closed and my head bowed as I prayed holding one of her hands. When I opened my eyes and looked up, she had the other hand lifted in praise and quietly said, “Thank you, Jesus.” She was able to surrender to the disease that racked her body because she had so long ago surrendered to the One whose life was laid down for her. The One who said, “Because I live, you shall live also. And death shall have no power over you.” Debbie died and we buried her two days later. Her funeral was a celebration of her victory, a victory handed to her by Christ. Her physical disease destroyed her body, but God’s healing power made her a spiritual giant.

So, whether you desire physical healing, or the healing of a wounded heart, whether you seek healing of a mental disease or of a broken relationship, whether you seek healing for yourself or for someone else, I invite you in the Name of Jesus Christ to ask him for it and trust him to give exactly what is needed.

Christ's main method of demonstrating God to the world was through acts of healing. Our gospel text for today is an example: “And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed” (Mk. 6:56 NIV). That word “healed” in this text hides a greater truth. The verb is the Greek word *sozo*, which is the exact same word as used to describe salvation!

For us today, as with those who first trusted in Jesus as God’s Messiah, he is our health and salvation. The healing oil and laying on of our hands are outward signs of the invisible healing power of God. We are invited to experience his healing in our lives. And, like those first disciples, we are sent out to bring his healing and compassion to those who are neighbors in the mission field that begins at our doorstep and continues to the uttermost parts of the earth. The signs of healing in those places may be an article of clothing or a cooking utensil, a hammer and a saw, a job, a place to live, or a voice that speaks the word of peace amid the sounds of anger, fear, and panic.

You and I are instruments of such healing as well as recipients of it. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, nourished by Word and Sacrament, commissioned by Jesus Christ, we are sent out into the world to be instruments of healing.