

Sunday, January 22, 2017

Forest Hills United Methodist Church

Broad Series: Grounded (The life of Jesus in four parts, Exploring Jesus as the incarnation of God in the created world, and how that gives salvation an earth grounding.)

Series Part 2: Dirty Feet: Jesus' earthly life.

Sermon #3: "Staying Stuck"

Rev. Dr. David Werner

Scripture: Matthew 9:1-8

Text: Mark 1:32-34a "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many of those who had various diseases."

Sermon Blurb: Jesus healed people when He walked on earth. We also hear about people who are miraculously healed by God still today. We all pray regularly for God to heal people. Yet there are so many who God does NOT seem to heal. God can, but doesn't. Why? Why does God heal some and not others in this life? This Sunday, as we walk with Jesus, we'll try to understand the purpose of Jesus' healing ministry.

Gathering Song: *Those Who Trust* - Andrew

Welcome: - Pastor David

Worship Set: - Sanctify

O Christ, the Healer

It Is Well

That's Why We Praise Him

Kids invited to Kid's Church

Prayers: HCI - Marilee

Offering: *Invitation Fountain* - Scott Van Daalen

Service Moment: Dulac Mission Trip - Andrew

PP#1: Grounded: Dirty Feet

Staying Stuck

"That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many of those who had various diseases."

-Mark 1:32-34a

Grounded: God's Dirty Feet. "Staying Stuck" Mark 1:32-34a "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many of those who had various diseases."

PP#2: Romans 13 (CEB)

“1 Every person should place themselves under the authority of the government. There isn’t any authority unless it comes from God, and the authorities that are there have been put in place by God. 2 So anyone who opposes the authority is standing against what God has established. ... 4 It is God’s servant given for your benefit. ... 5 That is why it is necessary to place yourself under the government’s authority. 6 You should also pay taxes for the same reason, because the authorities are God’s assistants

I think Facebook had a record week this past week. With the inauguration of our new president, people had no problem expressing their views. According to social media, people only had strong opinions: people think either we finally have hope again, or we’re doomed. I didn’t see, “He’s okay. Not my preference, but oh well. It’ll be fine.” My response, as your pastor, to you, is: Church, he’s our president. God ordained his power. So, no matter how you feel about him, you must pray for him and respect him. Romans 13. And, oh yeah, keep paying your taxes. Verse 6.

So, I’ve been avoiding Facebook, but this past week my daughter showed me a different kind of post, one aimed at Christians, all Christians. It’s a quote from atheist Tracie Harris. It kind of sums up, in one clinching, graphic statement, what atheists argue against people who believe in God.

PP#3: Image of Tracie Harris’ quote.

She says, “If I could stop someone from raping a child, I would. That’s the difference between me and your God.”

Ouch. That’s rough. Rape is a massive problem, and so evil! And, regrettably, its pervasive. And God doesn’t stop it! Same with all the other horrible things people experience.

This is such a strong argument because Harris accepts that Christians claim that God is good. The reasoning goes like this. In fact, church, I’m going to ask you to affirm it.

PP#4: Theodicy

1. God is good.

"No one is good—except God alone." -Jesus, Mark 10:10.

(See also Psalm 100:5, Jer. 33:11, Nahum 1:7, etc.)

OK, church. One: God is a good God. Church...God is good! [All the time!] All the time! [God is good!] So, yes, God is good. God is *only* good, and *only* God is truly good. We are agreed.

PP#5: Theodicy

1. God is good.

2. God wants only good things for His people.

“The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made.” -Psalm 145:9

Two: God wants only good things for His people. Church, is this true? It’s yes! God is good, and because He is good, He extends His goodness to all. He is good. He desires good. He does good.

PP#6: Theodicy

1. God is good.

2. God wants only good things for His people.

3. God can do anything.

“But all things are possible for God.” - Jesus, Matt. 19:26 (See also Eph. 3:20)

All right, feel the trap closing? One more. Three: God is able to do anything. Church, is this right? Yes it is. Ephesians 3:20 says, “God can do all things.”

So, there’s the issue. If God is good, and God wants good for all people, and God is able to do anything, then why doesn’t God stop rape...or SIDS? Some people say that this proves that if God exists, God lacks either goodness, or power, or both. But we affirm God exists, and has both.

And, Harris’ quote also acknowledges that it’s people who do evil things. But God still let’s them. Or disease is part of nature. But God still allows it. How do you respond?

PP#7: Why does God allow evil?

Church, the world is asking this question. Non-Christians may ask you this question directly. How do you answer? I’m going to push you a bit this morning. I’m going to ask you to take a whack at it. Turn to your neighbor, and give them a brief answer. Imagine the other person is a non-Christian whose 6-year old son or grandson just died of leukemia. And she asks you, “You’re a Christian, right? Why did God let my precious baby die?” Rough stuff! But it’s real. So, go ahead. Give it your best shot. Turn to your neighbor and answer the question. Really...go!

[Pause.]

OK! So, aren’t you glad you came to worship today? Just what you wanted to do!

PP#8: *Cover of C.S. Lewis’ book, The Problem of Pain*

Well, as difficult as this is, we need to be ready to respond to this. That means we have to come to terms with it ourselves, and then be ready to share it with others who are asking it, too.

Now, I image that some of you talked about God choosing to allow free will. Am I right? God limits what God does in people’s lives so that people can truly have free will. God let’s people be free agents, doing good or evil.

But let me push you. Why doesn’t God let people choose evil, but then stop it or counter it? Why does God let innocent people suffer because of other people’s actions? Or nature, like cancer?

Well, perhaps some of you suggested that suffering can produce faith and character. When we suffer we learn to turn to God, or else we will simply ignore Him and take His blessings for granted. We need to suffer consequences or else we will turn into spoiled brats.

But wait a minute. Don’t you pray when you are struggling? Don’t you ask God to bring healing and an end to your suffering?

PP#9: James 5 (CEV)

13 If any of you are suffering, they should pray. ... 14 If any of you are sick, they should call for the elders of the church, and the elders should pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 **Prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, for the Lord will restore them to health.** And if they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 16 For this reason, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous person is powerful in what it can achieve.

In fact, Christians also claim that God WILL come and help people who are suffering. God can heal. And God does heal...just not always.

So, perhaps the deeper question of theodicy (or, why does God allow evil), really, is why doesn't God *always* heal? This passage from James, although sounding great, is not a guarantee. It's not intended to be a formula: pray in faith and healing always follows. The larger context keeps it within God's will. "Should the Lord will it." This describes our part, but we cannot control God.

So, why is it that sometimes—or perhaps often—that the Lord does NOT will for healing?

PP#10: *Image of Jesus performing a healing.*

It is this question that hits us as we are walking around with Jesus. Jesus came and lived on earth, and walked around in the dirt. We're following Him around, on the ground, getting our feet dirty, too. We're trying to get close to Him, understand Him, experience Him. We want that personal relationship with Him that gives life. And so we're tracing His steps. And today, we see Him healing people. Yep, sick people went to Jesus and were miraculously healed. It actually happened!

Now, that's pretty exciting! It makes our eyes get wide, and our hearts race. God's power is breaking out! This man comes from God! Something special is going on here!

Yet, when we think about it for a minute, that theodicy question creeps in. Why did Jesus heal *some* people, and not others? Were those who happened to be near Him just lucky? Why didn't Jesus heal more? Why doesn't He heal more, now? Who does Jesus heal, anyway, and why?

This question begins to nag at us as we see the miracles Jesus performed.

PP#11: *Map B at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>*

Jesus began His public ministry at about the age of 30. He grew up in Nazareth, a village in the town of Galilee, up in the northwest of ancient Israel. And for about three-and-a-half years, Jesus travels around preaching, teaching, touching, healing, and doing miracles, all proclaiming that God's intended Kingdom had begun. He lived a Godly life giving Himself as an example, pointing to God in all that He does, demonstrates God's inbreaking power, and then earns salvation for all people by dying on the cross and being raised again.

We can divide up Jesus' earthly ministry around the Passover holidays He celebrated. His public ministry begins after a Passover He celebrated in Jerusalem. Before that, He spent some weeks getting ready. He left Nazareth, and went down to be baptized by John the Baptist near Bethany. He then fasted for 40 days in the desert, and returned north to the village of Cana.

PP#12: *Map C at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>*

He then goes to Capernaum, which soon would become His new home town and home base. Then, after Passover down in Jerusalem, Jesus begins His first year of ministry. He travels through Samaria to tell non-Jews about God. He goes home to Nazareth to reveal His ministry's purpose. He moves to Capernaum, and calls disciples to follow Him.

PP#13: *Map D at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>*

He spends the bulk of His first year traveling around Galilee, preaching, teaching and doing miracles. We can call this first year "His Year of Inauguration." It's a word we are now well familiar

with! But people are getting to see Jesus for the first time, learning about Him, and are impressed with His teachings and miracle working. He's the new rising star. He then heads down to Jerusalem for His second Passover.

PP#14: Jesus' 3½ Years of Public Ministry (perhaps AD 30-33)

Jesus begins Public Ministry (Beginning months)

Baptism, temptation, calling the first disciples

Year of Inauguration (First Year)

1st Passover (Jesus celebrates in Jerusalem)

Jesus moves to Capernaum and selects 12 apostles who travel with Him

Jesus travels throughout Galilee, preaching, teaching, and working miracles

Year of Popularity (Second Year)

2nd Passover (Jesus celebrates in Jerusalem)

Jesus makes three tours of Galilee, speaking in parables

Large crowds follow Jesus. People want to make Him king.

Again, after this Passover, Jesus heads back up to Galilee. By now He is widely popular. Everyone comes out to see Him and hear Him. They gather by the thousands! And He does not disappoint. He preaches the Sermon on the Mount, He preaches from the boat on the lake. He preaches on the plain. He feeds the 5,000. He works wondrous miracles.

PP#15: Map E at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>

He had made a long tour throughout Galilee the previous year. Now He makes two more tours through Galilee. On the first, not only does He heal the sick, He even raises a dead boy back to life, up in the village of Nain! His home base is the fishing village of Capernaum.

PP#16: Map F at <http://www.generationword.com/notes/bible-information/jesus-maps-ministry.html>

By the second tour of the year, however, His popularity begins to wane. The Jewish leaders start critiquing Him, challenging Him, not liking how He questioned the religious practices they wanted people to keep. Jesus' message gets stronger and stronger, too, and He denounces whole groups for being selfish and hypocritical. It's the rich and powerful who don't like Jesus very much...those who *have*. The *have nots* continue to follow Him, putting their hope in Him. But before long, nearly everyone begins to realize that Jesus' teachings hits home to them, personally, too. And not everyone is healed.

PP#17: Matthew 8:16

“When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to Him, and He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.”

Mark 1:32-34a

“That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many of those who had various diseases.”

At times, the Gospels say that Jesus healed all who came to Him, or all who were there. Matthew 8:16 tells about an evening when people came from everywhere. It says many were brought

to Him, and Jesus “healed *all* the sick.” But then, there are also times like Mark 1:34. It’s a similar scene. One evening, the crowds brought to Jesus *all* the sick and troubled. And Jesus, it says, healed “many.” Why not all of them? Matthew’s evening: *many* were brought and *all* were healed. Mark’s evening: *all* were brought, but only *many* were healed.

Why didn’t Jesus keep healing *all*? What is going on? What does it mean? And still to this day: why does God allow some people to stay stuck in their troubles, down in the mud, unhealed?

Since we’re traveling with Jesus, let’s listen in when Jesus does a miracle back in Capernaum. Jesus explains a bit about why He is doing miracles. Perhaps this will help us.

PP#18: Matthew 9:1-8 (CEB)

1 Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to His own town. 2 Some men brought to Him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the man, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”

3 At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!”

Jesus had crossed from Capernaum over to the southwest shore by boat. It’s when He calmed the storm. Well, He then got back in a boat, and went back to Capernaum. Matthew 9, verse 1,

“Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to His own town. Some men brought to Him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the man, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”

“At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, ‘This fellow is blaspheming!’”

So, Jesus is making a connection between spiritual faith and physical healing. Mark and Luke add that the four friends lowered the paralyzed man through a hole they made in the roof of the house. And notice, the teachers of the law are *thinking to themselves*. They hold their tongues; Jesus is still popular. But soon they will start challenging Him openly, especially at times like this. Jesus is acting like God! Only God can forgive sins. And Jesus just did it. What!?

PP#19: Matthew 9:1-8 (CEB)

4 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? 5 Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? 6 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So He said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” 7 Then the man got up and went home. 8 When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.

But Jesus, actually being God, knows their thoughts. Verse 4:

“Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, ‘Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So He said to the paralyzed man, ‘Get up, take your mat and go home.’ Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.”

PP#20: *Image of Jesus healing the paralytic lowered through the roof*

Jesus was unleashing God's Kingdom everywhere He went. That's what His purpose was on earth. He was showing people the full life that comes from God, and inviting them into it. God forgives sin. God wants people whole. The friends got it right. They come to Jesus, and as they do, they demonstrate an amazing faith in God, and a trust in God's ability to heal through Jesus. They weren't just hoping...giving it a try. They really believed that Jesus was who He said He was. The paralyzed man believed in Jesus enough to have his friends take him to Jesus, and they believed so strongly that He was the Messiah, that they stopped at nothing to get him there. That kind of faith brings forgiveness. And Jesus speaks out loud this healing, this spiritual healing.

But the teachers get the point. Jesus forgives sins. Only God can do that. The friends believed it, but the teachers deny Jesus in their hearts.

So Jesus does a miracle. He heals the man to prove that He can forgive sins, that He is the Messiah, that He is Himself God.

PP#21: Staying Stuck - Understanding God's healings

1. Jesus performed miracles for a purpose: to demonstrate His divine purpose

So there's a key insight about Jesus' healings. He heals for a reason. There is something else going on than the healing of the person. The man's healing is serving a greater purpose. This paralytic man was an object lesson. Jesus gave him spiritual healing, made him whole on the inside. This is why Jesus has come. This is His purpose and ministry. But He also pauses and heals the man physically as a physical proof to the teachers that He indeed does wield God's power, and He is who He claims to be. "I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

This is a profound insight into God's healings. Throughout the Bible, all the miracles and wonders told there, serve another purpose in God's bigger plan. It's not so much about the people being physically healed as it is about people opening their hearts to spiritual healing. The response is not so much, "Why did Jesus heal this person and not that person, do you understand it?" as it is, "Did you see that healing? That's proof that Jesus is the Savior! Now, what are you going to do about this Jesus?"

And this takes us to our second key insight.

PP#22: Staying Stuck - Understanding God's healings

1. Jesus performed miracles for a purpose: to demonstrate His divine purpose
2. God has a different understanding of "good"

God is good, and wants good for all people. But the key is what we understand to be *good*. You and I, we consider sickness, hardship, pain, sorrow all bad. But like some of you said earlier, they are not necessarily bad. They may be *hard*, but they also help us grow, and learn, and seek God, and trust. To God, it may be good for us to experience difficulties. In fact, the Bible says we should rejoice in them. For they bring perseverance, and character, and hope, and spiritual maturity.

God is not necessarily concerned about keeping us pain free, or physically healthy, or avoiding hardships. God is OK with us suffering. We may not like that! But when we look at Jesus, we see it more clearly. Jesus gave up His own comfort so that others could be made whole. He came down into the dirt, and suffered willingly, so that God's work could be completed.

Sometimes we get too focused on this dirt, this life, this comfort. We forget that we are called to give up ourselves so that we can join Jesus in His ministry of ushering in God's Kingdom. Because of the greater purpose of salvation, God is OK with suffering: Jesus' suffering for our sake,

and our suffering for the Gospel's sake. God reveals true good when Jesus dies on the cross. Christians call this terrible day, "Good Friday."

Yes, there is suffering that comes from just being in a fallen world, where evil is rampant and people are willful. But God is good. That doesn't mean He takes away pain. It means He enters into the pain and brings life. Rape is pure evil. God allows it to happen, but God does not allow it to win. He comes into that horrific pain, shares in that trauma, and brings healing, brings redemption.

PP#23: Staying Stuck - Understanding God's healings

1. Jesus performed miracles for a purpose: to demonstrate His divine purpose
2. God has a different understanding of "good"
3. God brings good to every evil

And that's the most important thing to remember about the problem of theodicy. This world is full of tragedy. God could stop it, but doesn't. Not because He isn't good, or He isn't able. But because He is bringing about a bigger reality. God doesn't take away suffering, He redeems it. God doesn't remove evil, He transforms it. God doesn't insulate His people from disease, He brings good out of it. God doesn't eliminate death, He brings new life.

PP#24: *Image showing the glowing goodness of God*

This is such a bigger God than a God who simply goes around fixing people's problems. This is a much better God than a God who defines good as the absence of pain. God is not an umbrella.

This is my answer to the question of why God allows evil. He doesn't always stop it. But He brings transformation, wholeness, abundant and eternal life. And I ask, don't you want this God when evil happens to you? This God, who we see in Jesus, is not just someone we just want to follow, but who we want to live with, and for, now, and forever.

God is good...[all the time]. All the time...[God is good].

Amen.

Closing Song: *How Great Thou Art* - Sanctify

Benediction: Pastor David