

Summerland United Church
April 28
Fifth Sunday in Easter
Resurrection Stories: Healed

Threshold Illness of mind, body, or spirit can sap us of our life passion and energy. Sometimes illness can change the course of our lives forever, asking us to adapt in ways we never imagined. And while illness is not visited upon anyone by God's design, sometimes limitations open our eyes to other possibilities. And we can look for a different perspective on how we deal with any life-altering situations.

Scripture: Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning they hold for you on this day. A reading from the book of John 21:1-8

21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin,^[a] Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

One: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection:

There are a lot of stories about healing in the gospels. Jesus gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, mobility to those who can't walk, removes skin ailments from those that suffer, and removes demons from people's minds. And these stories have both a hopeful and hurtful past, and let's be honest, the present as well.

They are hopeful, as they show that healing from illness is possible. They are hopeful because they teach people to not shun those who are differently abled. In ancient times, many people believed that illness was caused by bad behavior and wrongdoing. And

people with illnesses or were differently abled must have something wrong with them, which is why God is making them suffer.

So, here's where we start to get to the hurt of the healing stories. Because we know illnesses and being differently abled is not the result of transgression against God. They just simply are. And yes, some illnesses and disabilities can be overcome, mitigated, and healed – but there are plenty that cannot be.

For those of us with chronic illnesses, or genetic ones, our faith is not going to 'make us well.' I have faith in God, I believe in the teachings of Jesus, but this faith is not going to miraculously cure my brain's inability to balance my neurochemicals. As much as it would be awesome for it to work that way, it doesn't. I need my store-bought neurochemicals to manage my mental illness – depression.

And those who are differently able – blind, deaf, have mobility issues – they don't necessarily want to be 'cured' as they already live vibrant, full beautiful lives. Expecting people to want to be the same as the collective norm – is ableist and insulting.

Several years ago, now, I was witness to the misuse of a healing story from the gospels. In this instance the story was the one where a person who could not walk lay near a healing pool. They waited and waited and waited for someone to help them get to the pool, but no one did. Jesus comes and asks him if he wants to be healed. The man says yes, but he can't get to the pool. Jesus then tells him to get up and walk – the man is able too. He is healed.

The presider of this service spoke about the miraculous healing power of Jesus and repeat called out – *get up and walk, you are healed! You can be healed!*

And there I was sitting in the back of the church with my dear friend, in a wheelchair, who would never walk again. It doesn't help that later in this same narrative Jesus sees the now healed man and tells him not to sin anymore so nothing worse happens to him.

This story and its presentation shattered my friend. Wounded her in a way I'm not sure she ever healed from. We had to leave the service; Carolyn was so upset. And I was livid. How could anyone be so irresponsible with the gospel?

So, I tread carefully with the healing stories in the gospel, for Carolyn's sake and for the sake of others who have experienced such horrid theology.

When I saw that one of the resurrection themes was Healed – I thought 'oh, well here we go!' how am I going to manage these stories this time.

Then I read the scripture passage chosen for this theme – John 21. This isn't (at first glance) a healing story, is it? The only miracle is a ridiculous amount of fish.

But as I sat with it, I came to realize that it's actually an extremely powerful healing story, it's just told in such a subtle way, it's hard to see.

This is the 3rd and final time the disciples will see Jesus after his death in John's gospel. They are slowly, very slowly beginning to understand that Jesus, though he died, is still with them in a new and unique way. They are perhaps beginning to heal from their grief.

They are trying to get on with their lives, as we do, and trying to 'get back to normal,' but normal doesn't work anymore. Much like those of us learning to live with chronic illness, or having to learn to live post surgeries, or learn how to live after a great loss, or living after a global pandemic – normal doesn't work.

So, we look for the *new normal*. The disciples try to fish in the way they're used to – trying to carry on as if the last few weeks of their lives never happened – and it doesn't work. They don't catch any fish. The sea is empty.

Then Jesus appears to them and says *cast your net on the right side of the boat*. Assumedly a play on words that they had cast their net on the left or wrong side. Either way, Jesus is asking them to do their normal task in a different way.

And this results in an abundance of fish so great they can barely haul them to shore. When faced with profound changes and challenges in our lives, such as illness, loss, and global pandemics – the world is never the same again, nor are we. We need to find a way to accept that and determine for ourselves what the new normal will be.

After Jesus died, his friends and followers were never the same again, they had to accept this and find the new normal. They remembered the teachings of their friend who never followed the rules – insisted on sitting and eating with the marginalized, the shunned and forgotten. They remembered that Jesus turned the world upside down with his insistence the God loved all people, and with that love comes comfort, hope and peace of mind.

While comfort, hope and peace of mind aren't going to cure my chronic illness, it does help me live with it. It helps me live differently and accept it as a part of who I am. Perhaps I could call this a spiritual healing of sorts – though, please understand me when I say this healing didn't happen overnight, it took many long years of work to get to this point. A new life after a great loss, a great change or a diagnosis – isn't easy, isn't always straightforward, we get there in our own time and in our own ways.

And I think this story can be helpful as it can be a mirror for our own lives. The disciples want things to stay the same, they try to carry on as normal. But that just leaves them empty and in the dark. When they allow themselves to do their task in a different way, they receive abundance. As we're faced with challenges and hardship, such as illness or loss, we need to recognize that some of our day-to-day tasks of living may need to be

different too. We need to look for the new normal, where perhaps we will find a notion of healing.

May it be so.