

If It's Going to Be, It's Up to Me!

Preached by Dean Grant Lynn Ford at the Sunshine Cathedral, Fort Lauderdale, on Sunday, June 8, 2008

The Written Word

The Light of the Ages

Romans 4.18-24 (New Century Version)

¹⁸There was no hope that Abraham would have children. But Abraham believed God and continued hoping, and so he became the [ancestor] of many nations. As God told him, “Your descendants also will be too many to count.” ¹⁹Abraham was almost a hundred years old, much past the age for having children, and Sarah could not have children. Abraham thought about all this, but his faith in God did not become weak. ²⁰He never doubted that God would [be faithful], and he never stopped believing. He grew stronger in his faith and gave praise to God. ²¹Abraham felt sure that God was able to do what [God] had promised. ²²So, “God accepted Abraham’s faith, and that faith made him right with God.” ²³Those words (“God accepted Abraham’s faith”) were written not only for Abraham ²⁴but also for us. God will accept us also because we believe in the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

The Light of the Master Teacher

Matthew 9.9-13, 18-26 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁹As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. ¹⁰And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹²But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

¹⁸While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” ¹⁹And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, ²¹for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” ²²Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. ²³When Jesus came to the leader’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴he said, “Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. ²⁵But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. ²⁶And the report of this spread throughout that district.

The Proclaimed Word

Author Alan Cohen tells this story: “While I was presenting a program at a long-established spiritual retreat center, several participants and I were eating lunch at a picnic bench next to a snack bar. As we finished, one of the participants stood behind me and began to gently massage my neck and shoulders...

“Suddenly I was jarred by a deep voice booming, ‘No healing allowed here!’ I was certain this was another student playing a joke... To my surprise, the retreat center security guard was standing behind us... His name badge said ‘George.’ I looked at George in disbelief.

“‘I’m sorry,’ George uttered authoritatively. ‘No healing is allowed on the campus except in the healing temple. If you want to be healed, you have to go there.’

“I looked around at my friends and we cracked up. We thought this was a practical joke. After all, who would make a rule against someone being healed?...

“After lunch I walked back to my room for a siesta. By that time I decided the situation was quite funny. Who, then, do you think I encountered along the way? You guessed it—Officer George. I decided I would have some fun with George. ‘Sorry about that healing back there,’ I told him. ‘I can’t imagine what came over me.’

“George remained quite serious. ‘I hope you understand. If I let you do healing there, before you know it, people will be healing all over the place!’

“I had to muster all the will power I could to keep a straight face. I told George, ‘And that’s the last thing we would want to see happen, isn’t it?’

“‘That’s right,’ he answered.

“I dashed to my room, closed my door, and roared. This was too strange to be true. Then I remembered a Bible story that put my experience in perspective.”

You guessed it! Its part of the larger story, a portion of which we heard read to us this morning. In this portion the religious right complains that Jesus is eating with people “beyond the pale.” Elsewhere they complain that he’s healing on the Sabbath, or that he’s gotten too big for his britches.

Today we want to get beyond the complaints about Jesus, and look at the topic that he is demonstrating for us: healing.

I know you've all seen the television program where the evangelist prays for people and they are all healed. One evangelist prays for crowds of people and they all fall over, like a great wind blowing over a forest of trees. Whooom! Boom!

Ever wonder about those healings? Don't you suspect that the only ones we see on television are the ones that look healed? What about the rest...the ones for whom there is **no** dramatic change?

When Oral Roberts traveled the country in a tent, he had doctors checking out the 'miracle stories'. Katherine Kuhlman did the same thing. Doesn't happen today. It's because they discovered that not everyone was healed. In fact, the percentage of people actually healed who have come to these crusades is dismally quite low.

So, if you think like I think, you might ask yourself, "I wonder how many people Jesus prayed for that weren't healed. Do we only get the stories of the successful ones?"

I admit that those thoughts have crossed my mind. Is it possible that Jesus didn't bat a thousand?

In Matthew's account, Jesus has quite a string of successes. He prays for the centurion's love-slave—his boy, as the Bible calls him—who is healed. Then he goes a bit north and prays for Peter's mother-in-law, who is healed. After healing some more people he jumps into the boat, calms a raging storm and lands in the Gadarenes, he prays for a couple of crazy madmen who are healed.

Next he is confronted with a man who has no use of his limbs, who is healed. One of the synagogue leaders in this otherwise Greek territory comes to Jesus and asks for prayer for his daughter. Just at that moment the woman with the disease of the blood touches Jesus, and is healed. By the time they finish dealing with her and head for the man's house, the daughter seems to be dead. But Jesus scoffs at the mourners and raises the little girl up. Finally he caps off this chapter by healing two blind men.

So far Jesus' record is good; he's batting a thousand.

Matthew is making a couple of points here: 1) Jesus is a powerful healing agent; 2) to put it in Jesus' own words: "your faith has healed you."

If Jesus gives us any hope it is this: 1) we too can be powerful agents for healing, and 2) we and those we believe for are healed by our *own* faith, not Jesus' faith. Our faith! **If it's going to be, it's up to me!**

Mark tells a lot of the same stories, but he includes a somber note: it doesn't work every time. Jesus' batting record takes a real dip. Why?

You see, after this healing crusade through Capernaum and the Gadarenes, he goes home to see his mama, who lives on the other side of the lake and up in the hills. There the hometown boy preaches in the local synagogue. Let me read this story from Mark's gospel: "When the Sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue. People began to whisper: "'here does he get off, teaching that way?' They were astonished with his Chutzpah. A few were more impressed, saying: 'Listen to that! And those deeds he's done; quite impressive for a young man.'

"But the whispering didn't stop. They began to ask, 'Isn't he that carpenter's boy? You know, Mary's son? You know his brothers: James, Joseph, Judas, Simon. And he's got sisters. Aren't they up there in the balcony?' So they decided to pay the upstart no mind.

"Jesus just shook his head and retorted, 'A prophet is without honor... except in his hometown... right here with family... in his own house.'

"Hardly anyone even wanted to be healed, much less have hands laid on them. It was his turn to be astonished... at their lack of faith." *Mark 6:2-6a*

His batting record drops rapidly there in his own home town. Why? Because of "*their* lack of faith."

So what does it mean for us today? If we quit looking at Jesus as our Great Exception and begin to see him as our Great Example, then we will pattern our lives after his, and we can expect the same results "according to our faith".

Listen to what Jesus told the centurion: "It will be done just as you believed it would." And to woman with the blood ailment: "Your faith has healed you." To the blind men he said, "According to your faith will it be done to you."

Say it with me: **If it's going to be, it's up to me!**

Why, Paul tells us in our first reading "God accepted Abraham's faith, and that faith made him 'right on' with God!" Everything good that happened to the patriarch of Judaism, Christianity and Islam happened because Abraham believed in a Good God who would bless him with Goodness...even in his old age. Tell you what; I like *that* part right about now!

If we choose to simply believe Jesus, and then believe in our own faith, why, despite the Officer George's of the world, we will experience "healing all over the place!" And that's the truth!

The Final Word

The holy man of India, Sai Baba, tells us: "Love one another and help others to rise to the higher levels, simply by pouring out love. Love is infectious and the greatest healing energy."