

“Healing” - Stephanie Sorge, 2.8.26

What do we do with these healing stories in the Bible? They aren't all the same, but many of them leave me a little ill at ease. We've got a lot going on today, so I'll cut right to the point. I believe in healing. I've witnessed it. But far more often, I've seen people pray for healing that never comes.

I've never prayed for so much healing in such a short period of time as I did when we were in Nabarangpur. We were first invited to the home of Biraj, a good friend and neighbor of the Nags, who was just home from the hospital. Biraj is 37, and he just had a stent placed following a heart attack. In other words, he was already in the healing process, and it was easy to pray for that to continue.

The next day, however, far from the hospitals, in places of deep poverty, I prayed, and prayed, and prayed. For young people with sickle cell, and older people with back and leg pain. I prayed for a woman struggling with an alcoholic spouse, and for another expecting a grandchild. I even prayed for a mother dealing with a stubborn child. I prayed and felt the power of prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The strength of the faithful coming together for prayer was palpable. I also felt overwhelmingly powerless. (back to blank slide)

I don't believe that healing is tied to the strength of the petitioner's faith, nor do I think that a lack of healing is indicative of God's lack of power or desire to heal. I live in the uncomfortable limbo, but still, I pray. We pray.

Maybe these stories tell us that the impulse to come to Jesus for healing is the right one. And maybe they speak even more clearly about the importance of the community of prayer and support. The household of the royal official sat vigil with the dying son, and when he began to come around, one from the household was immediately sent to share the good news. The whole community believed. The man at Bethsaida lacked a community of support - even one or two who could help him get to the water. After being healed, he went to the temple. Despite the response of the Jewish leaders, his healing also restored this man to the community of believers.

We are made to be in community. Many of us have experienced the blessings of being in community, especially as the church. When I was five weeks postpartum and moved here with a 15-pound baby, you all showed up to help unpack, break down boxes, run errands, and hold Micah when he wasn't eating, which wasn't that often. You all have come together to provide all kinds of support, helping each other get through many difficult seasons of life. It's beautiful to witness and such a gift to experience. I've seen many of you embrace

others with the same love and support, much-loved neighbors and unknown strangers alike.

In these days when everything is just so awful for so many people, we need more of that. This isn't just about helping those in need; it's expanding our communities of care, and recognizing our interdependence. It's the last and most important message Jesus had for his disciples: love one another. Together, we are a community of faith, grounded in God's love, and together, we expand the community, too.

When we left the house churches in India, I wished I had brought all of my ibuprofen to give away. Even that would have been a temporary reprieve for some. But we weren't there to bring healing. We were there to be in community. To share communion. Our time with those house churches was limited, but Haresh, Hamitha, Hazel, and Harshita are there week after week. We are connected to them, and they are connected to so many more. I don't expect to hear about miracle healings following our visit, but we witnessed healing firsthand.

Most days, my faith leaves me with far more questions than answers. Many of those questions start with "Why?" These stories raise plenty of questions, but they consistently point us back to the basic command - love one another. In his

farewell discourse, Jesus didn't give instructions for ministry, or directions for healing. He certainly didn't give his disciples immunity from hardship. He gave them the gift of community in the commandment to love each other. It's one of the vows we make at ordination and installation - to serve God's people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

Our four incoming Elders are such wonderful examples of this. We all need to eat, and we all need to be nourished. Lizzy is doing that, quite literally, for our Trinity community and beyond. She is also challenging us to expand beyond our comfortable boundaries to welcome younger generations who are hungry for nourishment of all kinds. She and Donna will be working on outreach - something Donna has been doing for a long time, too. Donna lives near a refugee resettlement house, and she can tell you all about the families she has gotten to know over the years, bringing bread or groceries and friendship. She's also become Habibi to international students at Bridgewater College, particularly a few from Palestine who can't go home. In fact, last night, Donna was honored by the Town of Bridgewater for her many contributions within the community.

Mark and Rollin helped us expand our community in India. If there is any doubt that those children at Mercy House are our children, Mark might be the first to offer a rejoinder to disabuse you of that thought. Rest assured, you'll be

hearing more from him. Rollin was constantly connecting, not only with our hosts and the children, but also with strangers wherever we went. He has a gift of authentic curiosity, quickly establishing mutual respect and rapport. It's clear that he is guided by a quote he shared with the Session at our retreat. Lilla Watson, an indigenous Australian activist, said, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." I am so excited for the gifts that each of these new Elders brings to the Session and to Trinity, and I trust that they will guide us to live into a bigger, more complex, interdependent community. We will be better and more faithful for it. With God's help.

I am so excited to see what God will do in and through this community in the days, months, and years ahead. I pray that it all helps to build and deepen community, here in our backyard, and across the globe. We need a lot more of that, everywhere. May we seek that healing together, and see what God can do! Amen.