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June 14, 2020  
Matthew 9:35-10:23

“Am I Open to Being Healed?”

Just a word of warning, we'll be spending a lot of time this summer hanging out in the Gospel of Matthew. And the texts don't get much easier.

So, if you heard our scripture reading this morning and spent some of that time cringing, wondering where the heck this was all going, thinking to yourself, oh Lord, this is why I don't like reading from the Bible – you're not alone. Your Pastor is right there with you.

But here's the thing about God. And here's the thing about encountering Her in the Bible.

It's not meant to be easy. It's not meant to be comfortable.

Comforting? Sometimes, yes.

Comfortable? Definitely not.

These texts ask us to wrestle with them.

They ask us to suspend our pre-conceived notions and assumptions.

They ask us to be open to being surprised.

And when we do that – when we open ourselves to the discomfort of deep engagement – to the possibility that we may not already know it all – many facets of God, many facets of humanity – are revealed.

Will you pray with me?

Holy God – you never promised us a life of comfortable numbness. Help us to come awake, to receive your work and word in the world and to us. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O God, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

So, I'll be honest. I think you've come to expect that from me.

When I picked up this text again, earlier this week, I was troubled.

Immediately, I read it through a lens of the contemporary church. Thinking WE are the disciples.

The laborers – called to work the harvest, to bring in the plentiful bounty of unbelievers.

We are called to remind people that the Kingdom is near, to cure the sick, to cast out demons, to raise the dead – to gather the lost sheep of the world.

And perhaps that is our role sometimes.

But when I dig a little deeper I remember a crucial detail of the text.

Jesus is Jewish. He belongs to a synagogue. To an organized religion.

And he's not going to the synagogues to serve as laborers for the harvest.

He's sending disciples to the organized religion.

And he's sending them with a warning:

Some people will welcome you. Some homes will be ready to be healed, ready for your word about the Kingdom of Heaven.

And many others will not.

Some will drag you before governors and kings, hand you over to their councils, flog you in their religious buildings.

Some will be so unwilling to be healed that they will betray their brothers to the point of death and parents will betray their children and children will rise up against their parents.

All to avoid the word – the healing – the message you're bringing.

It's not a pretty picture – this moment when the Kingdom of Heaven draws near.

It's a distressing one.

And as members of organized religion, as believers (well, at least some of us) in the tenets of the Christian faith and the Christian religion – it's important that we place ourselves correctly and courageously in this text.

We're not always the disciples.

Sometimes, we're the world, the mainstream culture, the dominant religion, the lost sheep – that the disciples are sent to.

No matter what we proclaim we believe.

The Kingdom of Heaven has come near.

And there are people among us who bring a word of healing – a word ready to cast out the demons.

Professor Ibram X. Kendi, author of *Stamped from the Beginning* and *How to Be an Anti-Racist* describes the illness of racism, the demon of White Supremacy in this country, as a toxic rain that falls on all of us in this country all the time.

And many of us don't even realize we're getting wet. Don't even realized that we're getting soaked.

And we're being asked, right now, as we have been asked many times before, if we're ready to be made well.

As Jesus asks the sick man in the Gospel of John, "Do you want to made well?"<sup>1</sup>

We have a choice. We always have a choice. That's the difficulty of free will.

We have a choice to welcome God's difficult, but life-giving message, into our lives, into our very beings – but we also have the choice to reject it.

So, when you're invited to wake up, when our young people, our elders, our Black, Indigenous People of Color tell us about the stamp of racism on this country, on our own psyches, perhaps we can be courageous and welcome the healing word.

When we are asked to join the work of anti-racism – perhaps we can hear the invitation as Professor Kendi puts it:

"You know what you're wet. These racists ideas are still raining on your head. Here's an umbrella."<sup>2</sup>

And perhaps in response, we can simply say, "Thank you for the umbrella, I didn't know I was wet." And by saying so, then we can open ourselves to process of healing.

Church – the messages that we are hearing these days are not necessarily easy to hear.

It lifts a veil on our history, it lifts a veil on our present, and it lifts a veil on the very real sickness that dwells within ALL our hearts.

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<sup>1</sup> John 5:6

<sup>2</sup> Unlocking Us "Brene with Ibram X. Kendi on How to Be an Antiracist" June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020.  
<https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-ibram-x-kendi-on-how-to-be-an-antiracist/>

But if we are not willing to lift the veil, if we are not willing to at least being the process of healing – with always starts with knowing what to call our illness – people will continue to die.

That's the reality.

On this Sunday, June 14<sup>th</sup> – we sit at a crux of history. You know that part of the newspaper where they say this day in history?

Well, on this day – this week, this month, our history is painful. And joyful. And complicated.

On June 12, 2016 – 49 innocent, beautiful, LGBTQ lives were taken from this world while they danced and celebrated their lives at Pulse nightclub.

On June 12, 2020 – the Trump administration stripped away health protections for transgender people in this country. At a time when Trans-women are being murdered at a horrifying rate around the country.

On June 17, 2015 – nine members and leaders of Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, South Carolina were murdered while they prayed.

On June 19, 1865 – the day the Juneteenth holiday is celebrated – the Emancipation Proclamation was finally read in Galveston, Texas stating that all enslaved people were free. A full 2 and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed.

On May 31<sup>st</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921 – the Tulsa Massacre occurred which has been called the single worst incident of racial violence in American history.

On June 20, 2020 – the in-person re-election rallies for Donald Trump will resume in Tulsa – and the rally was originally planned for June 19<sup>th</sup>.

Our history of discrimination – of fear-mongering – of dehumanizing other humans – of racism, homophobia, sexism, xenophobia – is not a long-ago history in this country.

It is not a buried history. It is an ever-present reality.

And it fully shapes the world we live in now.

It is the toxic rain that falls on every single one of us.

We may wonder to ourselves – is racism really the biggest issue right now? What about climate change? Immigration Reform? The glass ceiling? Economic disparities?

And you're right – racism is one part of MANY injustices and crises in this country and in our world.

But they all relate. And racism is an underlying thread, an underlying condition, that informs ALL of our symptoms.

Do we want to be made well??

Are we ready and willing to face the problem of racism? Are we ready to admit our illness, our racism?

Am I open to being healed?

Church, we can pretty much trust that the Kingdom of Heaven will come near not when we're at our most comfortable, our most prosperous, our most competent – those are the times we let the kingdom of heaven slip away without even noticing.

The Kingdom of Heaven will draw near when we are at our lowest. When we are uncomfortable and grieving and unwell and ready for a change.

Those are the moments – the periods – when we are ready to let God into our lives.

Because letting God draw near is not a safe option. Letting the Kingdom of Heaven into our communities, into our souls, is NOT a safe option.

It is an invitation to transformation. To change. To the painful work of acknowledging that we may be good humans, but we could be better humans.

To the painful work of opening our eyes to the webs of evil that ensnare us and our communities.

Letting God draw near is letting ourselves be healed.

And healing does not come without pain.

We will never get it perfectly right. And as much as we may wish it – our healing will not come in an instant.

It won't be that easy.

Professor Kendi reminds us, some days we'll be racist, some days we'll be anti-racist.

It's not a linear line, an instant change, a direct, quick A to Z.

Austin Channing Brown reminds us that, “The work of anti-racism is the work of becoming a better human to other humans.”<sup>3</sup>

That’s it.

The work we’re being called to right now, the healing God is offering us, the umbrella being extended by the laborers –

is the work of becoming a better human to other humans.

And when we become a better human to ourselves, to other humans, to all of creation – we will begin to be healed.

And healed people are available to become God’s laborers in the bountiful harvest – the harvest of life, abundant life, for all.

Do we want to be healed?

Are we open to being healed?

I pray that I am. I pray that we are.

May God help it to be so.

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Unlocking Us, “Brene with Austin Channing Brown on I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness” June 10, 2020 <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-austin-channing-brown-on-im-still-here-black-dignity-in-a-world-made-for-whiteness/>