

The Holy Spirit & Healing By Caroline Park of the River NYC — November 11, 2018

For the last several weeks at the River we have been in a sermon series called, “The Power of the Holy Spirit in Ordinary Time.” We’ve discussed the many ways in which God has come close to us through the Holy Spirit, making it possible for us to experience her personally, and communally — everywhere and all the time. (At the River we often refer to the Holy Spirit as “she” in order to avoid masculine-only references to the Almighty. We believe we can gain a better and fuller understanding of God when we remember that God embodies, affirms and **transcends** both the masculine and the feminine.)

Now we are nearing the series’ end and will soon enter into the special time in the church calendar, Advent. But before we end the series, there is a topic that we must cover: Healing.

There are many many stories in the Bible involving the Holy Spirit and healing. The gospels are full of stories about Jesus healing the sick. If you are curious about them, you can read a couple great stories in Matthew 8 like our RiverKids did today. And it’s not just Jesus who heals people. There are also many stories of Jesus’ followers healing the sick and restoring them to their lives while Jesus’ was on earth and after His resurrection and ascension. It is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Despite the numerous stories about it, healing can be something that is hard to believe for many people. We can think, “Metaphorically, yes, but literal healing, I’m not so sure.” Or we think, “ Maybe it happened back then, but does it really occur now?” And even when we think that we DO believe it, we still carry some amount of disbelief.

It was like that for me, too. What really helped me believe that healing could be real is an incident when I prayed for myself in private and got significantly better. This was years ago when my kids were young and a nasty stomach flu was going around. The kids were sick and you know what happens at that age when they get stomach flu — it means a lot of crying and throwing up and sleepless nights washing and changing sheets! It seemed like everyone around me was sick and after a few days of that I could feel it coming, I was sure I was going down! I was literally in the bathroom on the toilet, when I prayed silently to God for the flu to go away. I felt something leaving my body. It was a weird feeling but then, I felt fine. I didn’t get sick.

After this experience, I began to believe that it happens. In this way, hearing the stories of healing happening here and now can be helpful for all of us. Today I’ve asked three people to share their stories of healing today. I hope hearing these stories will be encouraging and uplifting for you.

But I also want to acknowledge that more often than not, we pray for ourselves or someone else to get better and they don’t. I have been disappointed many times myself. And when there is disappointment, it can be hard to hear the stories of healing from other people. It raises questions: Why does God heal sometimes and not always? The

short answer is: I don't know. The Holy Spirit's power does break through into our world sometimes . . . but not always. I don't have any easy answers to that.

However, **I am certain** that the healings that we **do** receive and witness are gifts not just for those who were healed and their families, but for us all. For all believers and all humankind. They are not the proofs of God's personal favor for those who receive healing — but they **are** signs of God's love and closeness for us all. Sometimes we find inexplicable goodness and healing in this broken world and this, I believe, is a message from God. I believe God is saying to everyone, '**I am here, I care, come close to me**'. Healing is a gift for our community and our imperfect world. So as you read the following stories, I invite you to receive them as a gift for you — just like they were for those who are sharing today. We'll hear from Dave, then Phoebe who will be followed by Alison.