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SERMON TOPIC: CAN THE CHURCH STILL HEAL

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CAN THE CHURCH STILL HEAL

PRAYER

Gracious and eternal **God** we have come now to hear a word from you. And we ask as always oh, **God** that you would speak to us and speak through us. Teach us to love you more that we may learn to love each other and **Lord** help us to serve you better that we may be willing to serve each other. For it is in thy son's name that we pray, amen.

SERMON

From the scripture that was read in the book of Acts, chapter 5, beginning at verse 12 we want to read that again, Acts, chapter 5, beginning at verse 12 and there we find these words:

“The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No one else dared join them even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the **Lord** and were added to their number.

As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.”

I want to talk for just a few moments from a question can the church still heal, can the church still heal. We read here in this passage about another episode, if you will, in the apostles and the growth of the early church. We see here that they were able to perform many miraculous signs and wonders among the people.

Dr. Lloyd Oakalvy (ph) in his commentary writes that the church which resulted from being of one mind and soul with loyal commitment to the risen **Christ** and loyalty to each other had undeniable miracles. He tells us first of all that it was a supernatural church. Signs and wonders were done.

Signs from the Greek word *semia* (ph) were an outward evidence of the inner working of the power of the **Lord** in a person or situation. Let me say that again, the signs that are talked about here were an outward evidence, it was an outward visible evidence of the inner working of the power of the **Lord** in a person or situation.

Many of us raise the question does the **Lord** still do signs. Of course He does. In fact to put it quite simply these signs were given to tell folk that the spirit of **God** was at hand. It let them know that **God** was in their midst and I contend that just as **God** was present then God is also present today. **God** is still in our midst, my brothers and sisters.

Perhaps the problem, if there is one, with respect to the church's ministry of healing is not so much that the spirit is absent but that we ourselves are not sensitive enough to the presence of the spirit. So often I have used as an example a cell phone or a radio how in this room we can hear nothing other than the blowing of the air conditioner and my voice. But if we turned on a radio, we would hear static. As we raised the antenna or adjusted the antenna on the radio, suddenly you would hear voices. As you turn the dial on the radio, you could tune in to what they call different frequencies, if you will, and lock in on various voices in different places.

Well in the church, we ought to always have our spiritual antenna up and ready. It ought to be focused in and locked on to the presence of **God** in our midst. Sometimes **God** is in our midst and we are unaware because we don't have our spiritual antenna raised, if you will. We are not ready to receive the message, we are not ready to receive what **God** has to send to us. There is a transmitter and there is a receiver. **God** is the transmitter, we are the receivers.

Sometimes we're not aware of **God** in our midst because we're not properly tuned, if you will, to the movement of the spirit of **God** in our midst. Sometimes we think that if we get a lot of noise it means that the spirit of **God** is present. We want to have folk jumping up and down and running all over the place. Well that could be static. Maybe it's not the presence of **God** it's just static. You know you can turn up the volume and the static just gets louder.

Sometimes it's not the quality or the volume of the noise or the quantity of the people in the place that determines the presence of **God**. In fact I recall **Jesus** saying where two or three are gathered together in my name. Some of us act like we can't have church unless we got folk hanging off the balcony and falling all over the place.

Some of us act like the preacher hadn't preached if he doesn't grab the microphone, throw it up in the air, pirouette a 360, run around the altar, jump over the middle aisle, come back down and do a little dance in the middle of all of that. Then we walk around and say we had church.

But sometimes all you're getting is static. What we need to do is properly attune ourselves to the station on which **God** is transmitting so that we can receive that which **God** is giving. The signs that were given in the early church were an indication that the spirit of **God** was present in the church.

But not only were there signs, there were wonders. The Greek word here is *terata* (ph) which means these signs which caused one to be gripped by all. I've said it over and over again that I think we need to recapture a sense of all in the presence of **God**. When we come into the church this is a different place. If I see males or young boys walking around with hats on in the church, take it off, you're in the house of **God**.

The reason we don't allow folk to walk around in here with sodas and what have you is because we might be having something downstairs and we say keep food out of the sanctuary because this is the house of **God**. The reason we don't want anybody sitting in the balcony with potato chips and crackers and chewing gum -- you know I recall the stories of Sister Howell when she was alive passing a bulleting down the aisle to the young people telling them put your chewing gum on there. You weren't allowed to chew gum in the house of **God** because this is a special place.

This is a place where when we come in here we ought to feel a special sense of all, that we are in the presence of **God** in a special way other than what we would be out

there. Yes, **God** is present in my house. Yes, **God** is present with me in the car. Yes, **God** is present with me as I catch the bus on my way here. But **God** is here in a special way because this is **God's** house and therefore we ought to invoke a sense of all in people.

Some of us get the idea that we can come into **God's** house anyway we want, we can do anything we want, we can act any way we want. We act as if as though we don't know how to act when we come into the house of **God**. But you see there ought to be something different about our relating to one another in **God's** house.

In this place I may have been mad at you out there but just as soon as I got in here, the spirit of **God** hit me in such a way that my madness left me. I may have been angry in the parking lot but when I got into the house of the **Lord**, the spirit of **God** was running high in here in such a way that suddenly my anger left me and the spirit of **Christ** that's in me constrained me to remember that I love you in spite of what you may have done to me and I pray you will forgive me if I've done something to you. That's how I know that I'm in the presence of the **Lord**.

So my brothers and sisters, here in the early church they were gripped by all. Something beyond human ability was involved in the healings and transformed lives which were occurring as a result of **Christ's** spirit in the apostles.

Now some people ask what is happening in our churches which could be explained only by the presence of the Holy Spirit at work. Is there anything we are doing in the church today that shows that we know that the Holy Spirit is present and in our midst. Or to put it another way, is healing still possible in the church. Can the church still be a healing station.

Well somebody asked it another way and said as you ask that question let me raise another one, what are you attempting to do that could not be done without the Holy Spirit. Let me raise that again. If we want to know is the spirit of **God** present and active in the church today then I think we need to ask ourselves what are we attempting to do that we could not do without the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Well let me give you some examples. We've come through two phases of our building project here in the church. Some folk might say well you know we had folk, we had the numbers but there were those who didn't think it could be done. There were those who said no, the numbers don't sit right or the amount of money coming in on Sunday after Sunday doesn't seem to work right.

But somehow in spite of our numbers, if you will -- yall don't mind if I get a little happy on this. In spite of our figures and counting, if you will, **God** still moved in the midst. I get excited about that. **God** still moved in the midst and we were able to complete 2/3 of the building project with work done and paid for because the Holy Spirit was present.

We went to one bank and asked to borrow some money and they didn't want to give us everything we asked for because they did not think we could do it. Yes, we've paid off what was given far earlier than should have been. I'm suggesting to you, my brothers and sisters, that there are examples of the Holy Spirit at work in our midst. We just need to be sensitive enough to look for it.

There are folk in our congregation who have been sick, who've been down on sick beds and sure enough sick. But they've prayed and somebody prayed for them and they are able to be here now because **God** answers prayers.

You see the Holy Spirit is at work in our midst and is still touching and healing and blessing and strengthening and bringing about His work. But we've got to be sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit. I tell you you can't always judge by the amount of noise in the house.

But not only that, my brothers and sisters, we are told that here was a church that was respected and growing. Now it seems almost contradictory, you say how can the church be growing when it says right here in verse 13 that no one else dared join them even though they were highly regarded by the people. Yet verse 14 says nevertheless more and more men and women believed in the **Lord** and were added to their number.

You see folk came to realize because of something that had happened earlier. When you go home tonight read the beginning of chapter 5 in the book of Acts. You'll read there the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They were two folk who lied when they didn't have to lie and the Holy Spirit struck them dead on the spot.

Well there were folk who became afraid. They realized that joining the church had a high requirement. They realized that you can't come in here and play some religious hucksterism kind of game. That you can't come in here with just any old kind of mess and think you're going to get by on what you've got. So some folk who may have been tempted to join just because everybody else was going along decided I'm going to stay away from that. But those who were authentic and understood what was going on joined the church and the church grew and moved on in **God's** name rather than in people's name.

My brothers and sisters, they grew. They grew and they were respected in the name of the **Lord**. Somebody once raised the question what does it take to make a great church. The answer came back not soft seats and subdued light but courageous leadership. Not the sweet tones of the organ but sweet personalities. Not tall towers but lofty vision. Not a big budget but big hearts. Not money received but service rendered. Not large membership but **God's** presence. Not what it has done in the past but what is it doing for **Christ** now and in the future. That's what it takes to make a great church.

My brothers and sisters, here is a church that was a healing church. Let me say something about that. You see people are ill even today, they need **Christ's** healing hand on their hearts, their minds and their bodies. But there's a difference between the pastor preaching a sermon on healing and opportunities being provided for people to receive **Christ's** healing through prayer.

Prayers for healing can be offered at any point. When we gather at the altar at the end of the invitation, our altar prayer is not just a prayer to say **Lord** make me happy this week. But there are people who gather around the altar who bring their burdens to the **Lord**. Somebody has been hurt this week. Somebody's feelings got messed over this week. Maybe somebody is struggling with a divorce or maybe somebody's relationship is in trouble. Or perhaps somebody is wrestling with **God** over a decision about a job or what's going on on their job. Or somebody is frustrated and discouraged with what's going on at home. Or perhaps somebody just received a diagnosis from the doctor and the diagnosis didn't look good. I don't know what the problems may be. But when folk gather at the altar, they gather knowing that they expect healing from the **Lord**.

Somebody says can the church heal today, I contend the church can heal but only through the power of **Jesus Christ**. It is not the church that does the actual healing. But the church can be a vehicle through which healing can take place.

Somebody said well wait a minute, we got doctors, we got nurses. Yes, we do and thank **God** for the knowledge that they have. But there comes a point when even the doctors and the nurses have to admit something is out of their hands. There comes a point, and I hope you never have to be one of those, when the doctor stands and looks over you and shakes his head and says there's nothing else that I can do because that can be a desolate feeling.

But guess what? I know a **God** -- you know the old folk used to sing a song Come On In My Room. Come on in my room. King **Jesus** is my doctor. He writes down all of my prescriptions and He gives me all of my medicine in my room. Sometimes my brothers and sisters, we need to get together in each other's rooms, if you will, and we need to join hands with one another and pray for healing for one another.

The bible teaches us that the effectual prayer of the righteous will avail much. Now that means you've got to be right with **God**. Don't just think you can walk up there just because you feel like walking up there. Or just because you gave so much to the church that suddenly you've got power. No Simon the sorcerer made that mistake and thought that he could buy the gift of healing. Now we call that term Simony when someone thinks that they can buy what the Holy Spirit gives for free.

So my brothers and sisters, people need more than just the shadow. In the story it says people laid down so that Peter's shadow could touch them as they walked by. But I would contend that today folk need more than just your shadow. Some of us get so busy that we're like shadows passing in the night. We don't see each other, we just see the shadow.

Some of us in our own homes don't see each other we only see the shadow. We get up in the morning and we're gone. We come back in the evening and it's time to go to bed because we're so busy doing this, that and the other thing.

Luke tells us that the sick were laid in Peter's path so that at least his shadow would fall on them. But as I've already said people need more than the shadow of our busy lives. People need personal contact. They need to be listened to. They need physical contact of touch. The gentle laying on of hands, if you will, as described in James, chapter 5, verse 14 is anyone sick among you. Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the **Lord**.

Now understand something here, it's not just the elders that have the power. You see the hand, if you will, is indicative of imparting power. The oil is simply an aid to faith because the oil is symbolic of healing. It is also a symbol for the Holy Spirit. So when they put the oil on you it's just an aid to faith. But the healing takes place through the power of **God**.

Can the church still heal? Yes, it can. Is anyone sick, call the elders of the church. We ought to get together every now and then and just pray for healing. We don't have to pray for the **Lord** to give us a bigger budget, we don't have to always pray **Lord** help us to get more members, **Lord** help me to hit the lottery, you know all the kinds of stuff we pray for. Instead we ought to just pray for the healing of each other. People need to know that somebody is concerned about them. People need to know that somebody is willing to pray for them.

So my brothers and sisters, when we talk to the **Lord** about each other I believe we are showing forth the spirit of **Christ**. It doesn't matter whether you run around, jump up and down, shout and scream, the power of **God** is what ultimately brings about the

healing. He will use our gentle touch as a physical sign of His own spiritual hand. There will be wonders, be sure of that. A supernatural church, a respected church, a healing church that three point thrust makes us want the same thing for our churches today.

We ought to be spirit filled. We ought to be the exclasia (ph), the people of **God**. We ought to be able to gather together and pray for one another in a moment's notice. I don't have to wait until I get to a certain place to pray for you, I can pray for you over the phone. I can pray for you right here in the pulpit or I can pray for you if I'm in my study and you can pray for me no matter where you are.

We can pray for each other at home, on the job, on the bus, sitting at a red light, wherever. Now when you're sitting at the light don't close your eyes too long. I'm not asking you to get in trouble. But the point that I'm making is we can pray and we can pray for healing.

My brothers and sisters, people need to know that healing is available through the church. The church can still heal. It's like raising the question is there a balm in Gilead, is there no physician there. In other words, can I come to the church and find what I can't get out there. The healing that I really need goes deeper than just the physical. Many times the healing that I need is spiritual. The problems that I'm facing are spiritual. It's got nothing to do with physical circumstances.

Physical circumstances have been created by the inner spiritual turmoil that's going on in me and because I can't get myself together, I'm causing chaos wherever I go. Then I wonder why is this stuff happening in the way that it is. If you get the spiritual stuff right, if you get right with **God** and get that taken care of, you might be surprised at the healing that takes place in things going on around you.

The early church was able to perform miraculous signs and wonders among the people and all the believers met together in Solomon's Colonnade. Nevertheless more and more men and women believed in the **Lord** and were added to their number. Crowds gathered from towns around Jerusalem bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits and all of them were healed.

My brothers and sisters, healing is still possible but it is a healing that comes from **God** not from us. We've got too many religious hucksters out here, those who are playing at the healing game, those who are claiming things as though it was in their name rather than in the name of **Jesus Christ**.

No wonder the question came in that passage we see in the Grand Inquisitor that passage there where the question was raised, look at the church no longer can we say silver and gold have we none. But the reply came back neither can you say in the name of **Jesus** get up and walk. Perhaps we've become too caught up with the stuff that this world has to offer and not focused enough on the word of **God** and what it is that the **Lord** is trying to tell us.

My brothers and sisters, we need to study the word of **God**. We need to let **God** speak to us, we need to take our direction from him, we need to rightly divide the word of truth, we need to avoid these cults and isms out here, we need to stop separating ourselves as if as though we think we've got all of the knowledge and all of the training and no one else can tell us anything.

We've got to understand that **God** has His own higher archy and we've got to be submissive to what **God** has laid out before us. When we submit to the will of **God** and say not I **Lord** but you. Then **God** will bring about the healing that we seek.

When we want to see signs and wonders, the wonders will be the changed lives that **God** has brought. The change will be the families that were broken that **God** has healed and restored. The signs will be the relationships that are no longer fractured and falling apart but now finding fullness and wholeness. Now the wonders and the signs will be the people who are no longer divided within themselves but now constitute a unified whole and understand what it means to be called a child of the king.

My brothers and sisters, healing is possible. Healing in the church is still possible when you trust in the **Lord** with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding. There are some things we can learn from medical science and thank **God** for the medical knowledge that is available. But ultimately by **God** all healing, all healing comes from him. Ultimately we have to thank him for what it is that He provides.

The doors of the church are open. The invitation for Christian discipleship is now extended.