



Healing and Raising the Dead

Jesus Heals

About the Story

Today's stories bring us from Jesus' great sermon in Luke 6:17-49 to powerful stories of healing and resurrection. As will be done through most of the Gospels, Jesus' compassionate teachings and challenges will be tied up with his miraculous healings and exorcisms. The coming of the kingdom of God happens on mental, emotional, and physical levels.

There are many cultural and historical nuances in today's stories, which make the interactions between Jesus and those seeking healing even more complex. The centurion (Luke 7:1-10) is a Roman military commander, the local symbol of oppressive force and power. He is also a Gentile, a non-Jewish person who is therefore excluded from synagogue and temple worship. He should be the enemy of the local Jewish elders. Yet instead, he loves the Jewish people, builds their synagogues, treats their elders and rabbis with great respect, and cares for his slaves.

In the same way, the widow's story (Luke 7:11-17) is made even more tragic in context. With the death of her son, she loses not only her only child, but also her access to social and economic support. Women without husbands or adult sons relied entirely on the kindness and hospitality of their communities; their security and safety was often in danger. A childless widow would be considered among the most needy in society, with no close male relatives to protect or support her. When Jesus touches her dead son, he breaks a ceremonial law against contact with dead bodies (Numbers 19:11-13), making him ritually unclean.

Just as Jesus has been previously willing to break tradition around the Sabbath, Jesus shows himself willing to go outside the boundaries of Jewish religion and ritual purity in order to heal those on the edges of the community. God's miraculous healing is not just for those on the inside but for all of us.

The Point:

Jesus brings life to outsiders, just as he brings life to us all. In today's stories, Jesus is drawn into interactions with outsiders—two people on the margins of Jewish society. One outsider is powerful and well connected (the centurion) while another is facing poverty and great loss (the widow). In both situations, Jesus recognizes their pain and offers miraculous healing that transforms their worlds. No matter what our position in life, God is willing and able to reach us where we are and offer healing for our grief.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, Jesus revealed himself as “Son of Man” and “Lord of the Sabbath,” two controversial claims that put him in direct conflict with those in power. With today’s lesson, we move into stories of healing and forgiveness, beginning with two incredible miracles for a centurion and a widow who are facing great loss. Next week, Jesus’ healings come to the attention of the imprisoned John the Baptist, who sends his followers to ask if Jesus is truly the Messiah they have been waiting for.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together with this or another prayer:

Healing God, you see us in all our brokenness. No matter where we are, whom we include or exclude, you reach out to us where we dwell. You find us no matter where we may be hidden. Seek us out now, in this space, that we may hear your words and see your glory in the Son you sent to us, Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Into the Story

Today’s story features some surprising outsiders who do not go unnoticed by Jesus. Sometimes being an outsider is not a moral judgment but rather a description of circumstances that have left someone out, for no real fault of their own. Where have you heard stories of outsiders this week? Who do you think are currently outsiders in your country, your community, even your church?

Learning the Story

Jesus finishes his sermon (Luke 6:17-49) and continues traveling throughout the Jewish region of Galilee. He will face two unplanned encounters with people who desperately need his help and healing power.

Read Luke 7:1-5 – A Centurion Sends for Help

- ❓ Just prior to today’s passage, Jesus gives Luke’s short version of the Sermon on the Mount. Quickly skim the blessings and woes (Luke 6:20-26) and loving your enemy (Luke 6:27-36) passages. Where might a Roman military commander fit into all of this?
- ❓ Is it surprising to hear about a highly valued slave? What was their relationship like?
- ❓ When have you called on a friend to help you get in touch with someone important? How did they react?

Read Luke 7:6-10 – A Man Under Authority

- ❓ The centurion treats Jesus with exceptional respect. When have you been so intimidated by someone’s power and fame that you did not even try to speak to them directly?
- ❓ The centurion believes Jesus can command health and sickness the same way the centurion commands soldiers. Is this true? Where does it work as a metaphor, and where does it fail?
- ❓ Jesus’ declares that the centurion’s faith is greater than what he has found in Israel. How do you think the Jewish elders felt when they heard that?

Read Luke 7:11-17 – A Mother’s Only Son

- ❓ How does learning more about this cultural context, specifically the situation of widows, deepen your understanding of this passage?
- ❓ Jesus says, “Do not weep,” which might seem unkind to a mourning mother. When has someone said or done something to you while you were emotional that was not helpful? How were they trying to help?
- ❓ What is the connection between raising the dead and being a great prophet? How does it show God’s favor?

Bible Connections

- ✚ Jesus’ raising of the widow’s son recalls another prophet who was able to raise a dead child (1 Kings 17:1-24).
- ✚ Another widow will appear in Jesus’ parable about persistence (Luke 18:1-18).
- ✚ After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the centurion Cornelius will be brought into the new Christian church (Acts 10:1-33).

Living the Story: Prayer

In today’s stories, we learn that Jesus is willing and able to act in the lives of those who are hurting, no matter their background or whether they have even asked him. Pray together:

We pray today for those who are hurting in body, mind, or spirit.

Like the centurion, we ask for healing for those we love. We pray today for those who have come to us to ask for prayer and for all those who have reached out for help. We pray especially for... (allow time for names to be spoken aloud).

Like the widowed woman, we ask for healing for people and groups we do not know well... (allow time for names to be spoken aloud). Amen.

Closing Prayer

End your time together with the following or another prayer:

Jesus, healer, forgiver, restorer, we celebrate your divine love. Love that saw that boundaries between Gentile and Jew, slave and free, women and men, even dead and alive are not the final rules of the world God made. Love that healed a soldier’s slave and a widow’s only son. We thank you for your inclusive, life-transforming love. As we go from here, empower us with your love and give us courage to cross the lines that have kept others out and to forgive those who long for healing and wholeness. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: The Roman Empire

The relationship between the Roman centurion and the Jewish leaders is quite remarkable. In most of the region of Roman Palestine—including the Jewish areas of Judea and Galilee—the Roman leadership ruled with an iron fist. The Roman Empire was moving swiftly to try to conquer the world, and the imperial province of Palestine was seen as troublesome backwater region filled with people who would not quietly submit to Roman rule and Roman gods. In the time of Jesus, tensions between the groups were coming to a head, and many of the Jewish people hoped the Messiah’s return would mean the destruction of Rome. Unfortunately, the opposite happened when one of a series of Jewish revolts led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

At Home

- ✚ Pray this week for the courage—arising from trusting in God—to spread Jesus' love.
- ✚ Jesus is able to see and respond to pain in outsiders of many kinds. Reflect on when and where you are an insider. In what situations are you an outsider? Who do you see that is treated like an outsider?
- ✚ This week, listen for those in your life who may be suffering unheard and without hope of help. How can you use your own position and resources to assist them in some way?

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read Luke 7:1-17

Jesus works incredible miracles of healing the sick and raising the dead. How have you seen God work for healing and recovery in your life or in your faith community?

Monday—Read Luke 8:40-56

In another story, Jesus saves another only child—the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus, a synagogue leader. What would it be like to lose your only child and then, in the same day, to get them back?

Tuesday—Read John 11:38-44

Jesus once again raises the dead—this time, his friend Lazarus. Call or contact a friend who recently lost a loved one, and offer to bring over a meal or help in some other way.

Wednesday—Read Luke 18:1-8

Jesus tells the story of a woman persistent in asking for justice. Where have you seen justice denied? How can you use your voice to help those who are powerless?

Thursday—Read Acts 10:1-16

Peter is prepared for an encounter with a vision from God declaring, “What God has made clean, you must not call unclean.” When have you been moved to reconsider your belief about another group of people?

Friday—Read Deuteronomy 24:17-22

In the laws of Deuteronomy, God asks the people to care for the foreigner, orphan, and widow in their midst. How does your workplace, church, or home life show care for those who are vulnerable?

Saturday—Read Luke 8:26-39

Jesus casts out demons from a marginalized and isolated man in Gerasene, a non-Jewish territory. Why do you think Jesus left Jewish territory to reach out to a Gentile?