

“In this beautifully written and marvelously conceived book, Amy Ekeh shows us how the healing miracles of Jesus speak to us and offer healing for our lives today. A rich resource for those seeking to pray with the Scriptures.”

—Frank J. Matera, professor emeritus,  
The Catholic University of America

“Amy Ekeh’s reflections, as usual, enrich our reading of the Gospel stories in such wonderful and often surprising ways. Praying with this beautiful book will help us become ever better healers and allow ourselves to be healed.”

—Carol Keehan, DC, retired president/CEO,  
Catholic Health Association

“Amy Ekeh has mined profound insights from each Gospel story that will surely guide healing encounters with the Lord in personal prayer, pastoral care, homiletics, and faith formation.”

—Bruce T. Morrill, SJ, author of *Divine Worship*  
and *Human Healing*

“These reflections will serve homilists, caregivers, and anyone who’s ever longed, deeply and personally, for the healing touch of Jesus.”

—Alice Camille, author of *For Everything There Is a Season*  
and *A Little Book of Light*

“This beautiful work will bring hope to so many in our broken world who seek the healing touch of Christ. Amy Ekeh has given us a treasure: an insightful, thought-provoking, soul-stirring look at the stories of healing in the Gospels that ends up being a kind of ongoing, heartfelt prayer.”

—Deacon Greg Kandra, journalist and author of  
*A Deacon Prays*

“Amy Ekeh has succeeded in packing into one book an astonishing amount of colloquial, meaty, thought-provoking reflection on the healing stories of the Gospels.”

—Genevieve Glen, OSB, author of *Sauntering through  
Scripture and By Lamplight*

“*Stretch Out Your Hand* is a delightful book on the healing ministry of Jesus filled with fresh spiritual and biblical insights. If you or your loved ones are in need of healing, this book is definitely for you.”

—vănThanh Nguyễn, SVD, professor of New Testament studies, Catholic Theological Union

# Stretch Out Your Hand

## *Reflections on the Healing Ministry of Jesus*

Amy Ekeh

Introduction by Thomas D. Stegman, SJ



LITURGICAL PRESS  
Collegeville, Minnesota

[litpress.org](http://litpress.org)

Cover art: *Go On, Thomas* by Jack Baumgartner

Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition © 1989, 1993 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

© 2025 by Amy Ekeh

Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, except brief quotations in reviews, without written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Ekeh, Amy, author.

Title: Stretch out your hand : reflections on the healing ministry of Jesus / Amy Ekeh ; introduction by Thomas D. Stegman, SJ.

Description: Collegeville, Minnesota : Liturgical Press, [2025] |

Includes bibliographical references. | Summary: "These forty reflections take us deep into the heart of powerful Gospel stories, helping us hear and experience them anew so we too may stretch out our hands-to receive and to extend the healing ministry of Jesus"— Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024028618 (print) | LCCN 2024028619 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814669815 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9780814669822 (epub) | ISBN 9780814689660 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Spiritual healing—Christianity. | Healing—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Bible. Gospels.

Classification: LCC BT732.5 .E39 2025 (print) | LCC BT732.5 (ebook) | DDC 234/.131—dc23/eng/20240807

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024028618>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024028619>

For Tom

*May I find my healing in this giving.*

*—Prayer of Surrender of Fr. Walter Ciszek, SJ*



# Contents

Preface   xiii

Introduction   xv

Reading the Healing Stories   xix

## Reflections

*Jesus Heals at Sunset*   3

1. At Sunset

*The Kingdom of God Has Come Near*   7

2. Start at the Beginning

*Jesus Heals a Man with an Unclean Spirit*   11

3. The Holy One of God

*Jesus Heals the Royal Official's Son*   15

4. Those Who Beg

*Jesus Heals Simon's Mother-in-Law*   19

5. Egeiro

*Jesus Heals a Man with a Skin Disease* 23

6. If You Choose

*Jesus Forgives a Man Who Is Paralyzed* 27

7. Faith

8. Friends

9. Forgiveness

*Jesus Cures a Man Who Is Paralyzed* 35

10. Which Is Easier?

*Jesus Heals a Man with a Withered Hand* 39

11. Stretch Out Your Hand

*A Multitude at the Seaside* 43

12. Vulnerable Healer

*Jesus Heals the Servant of a Roman Centurion* 47

13. Pot of Gold

*Jesus Heals a Man with Demons in Gerasa* 51

14. Legion

15. Banish the Healer

*Jesus Raises the Daughter of Jairus* 61

16. Silence Heals

*Jesus Heals a Woman Who Has Suffered  
for Twelve Years* 67

17. Just the Fringe



<i>Jesus Teaches and Heals</i>	71
18. Dynamis	
<i>Jesus Heals Many at Peter's House</i>	75
19. The Closing of Day	
<i>Jesus Heals Two Men Who Are Blind</i>	79
20. When the Cure Doesn't Come	
<i>Jesus' Compassion for the Crowds</i>	83
21. Reservoir	
<i>Jesus Raises a Mother's Son in Nain</i>	87
22. Her Only Son	
<i>Jesus Heals a Man at the Pool of Bethesda</i>	91
23. No One	
<i>Jesus Heals the Sick in Gennesaret</i>	95
24. God with Us	
<i>Jesus Heals the Daughter of a Syrophenician Woman</i>	99
25. Tired	
<i>Jesus Heals a Man Who Is Deaf</i>	103
26. Be Opened	
<i>Jesus Heals a Woman Who Is Bent Over</i>	107
27. Bent Over	
<i>Jesus Cures Many on the Mountain</i>	111
28. Great Crowds	

*Jesus Heals a Man Who Is Blind at Bethsaida* 115

29. Presence and Process

*Jesus Heals a Boy with a Spirit* 119

30. In Gritty, Gospel Detail

31. A Parent's Prayer

*Jesus Heals Bartimaeus* 127

32. Make Some Noise

*Jesus Heals Ten Men with Leprosy* 131

33. Total Praise

*Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind* 135

34. Mud and Spit

*Jesus and Zacchaeus* 139

35. Zacchaeus, Come Down

*The Death of Lazarus* 143

36. Fleeting and Forever

*Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead* 149

37. Unbound

*Jesus Heals the Ear of the Slave of the High Priest* 153

38. Wounds

*Jesus and Thomas* 157

39. I Will Not Believe

<i>The Judgment of the Nations</i>	161
------------------------------------	-----

40. We Are Healers, Too	
-------------------------	--

Acknowledgments	165
-----------------	-----

References	167
------------	-----



# *Preface*

## The Desire for Healing

The desire for healing is an instinct that binds us all—a feeling that “all is not right,” a yearning for transformation, an urge to live freely beyond the limits of our fragility. Into this human desire comes a God whose love extends to every person, a Redeemer whose touch brings the wholeness we long for, a Spirit whose presence is balm spilling over into every corner of our hearts and lives.

Yes, in our desire to be healed, we are blessed. Not because the yearning stops. Not because the questions are answered or the cures guaranteed. We are blessed because this path we walk is one of promise: our God is a God who heals.

This book on Jesus’ healing ministry was originally envisioned as a joint project with Thomas D. Stegman, SJ. It was our shared wish to spend time with these extraordinary Gospel stories, to imagine and pray with them, to write about them, perhaps even to bring some comfort to those who deeply yearn for the restorative touch of this healer from Nazareth. The idea was conceived in the midst of

Tom's own struggle with a terminal diagnosis of glioblastoma. Until very close to the end of his life, it was his firm intention to write this book. (We did get as far as a joint introduction, which you will find below.)

In one of our conversations about this project, Tom told me he wanted to explore one idea in particular: the distinction between *being cured* and *being healed*. He knew that without a miracle—for which many fervently prayed—a cure was not in his future. And yet, *healing* . . . this was something he lived and breathed. The belief that the healing hand of Jesus Christ was firmly grasping his own was enough. And he willingly extended that hand to others, a healing presence in his own right.

Ever the teacher, Tom died on Holy Saturday—April 8, 2023. And so the writing of this book falls to me alone. But I do it in his friendship, believing he is with the Living One, and honoring his belief that one need not be cured in order to be healed, and that the human desire for wholeness is nothing other than our invitation to God to come and change us.

Amy Ekeh



*Thomas D. Stegman, SJ (1963–2023), was dean and professor of New Testament at the Boston College Clough School of Theology and Ministry—a respected scholar, prolific author, and popular retreat director. A Jesuit of the Midwest Province of the Society of Jesus, Tom was also a beloved brother, son, and uncle; a valued colleague; and a friend to many.*

# *Introduction*

*Fr. Tom Stegman's original introduction is below.*

As I type these words during a gentle snowfall in New England, I have two lines from today's eucharistic liturgy ringing in my ears. One is the verse from the Gospel Acclamation: "Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom and cured every disease among the people" (Matt 4:23). The other is Jesus' response in the Gospel reading to the poignant cry of a leper that, if the Lord wished, the man would be made clean. Jesus' response? He was "moved with pity" or, better, "moved with compassion" (Mark 1:41). And out of that compassion, Jesus touched the man and healed him.

We can glean two important ideas from these lines that will help to set the stage for the reflections that follow. First, there is an inextricable link between Jesus' healing ministry and his proclamation of the coming of the reign of God. Jesus, who came to inaugurate God's reign, does so in no small part by healing people of various illnesses and afflictions. In doing so, he shows that God's design for God's people is that they experience wholeness and fullness of

life. As the evangelist John expresses it, Jesus came to reveal God's love (3:16), through which we might "have life, and have it abundantly" (10:10).

Second, the Gospel verses quoted above make clear that Jesus' healing ministry is a manifestation of God's *compassion* for us. Our God is no distant "unmoved mover" but one who cares deeply for all creatures. Jesus is the face of God's love and compassion. His healings reveal not only God's salvific power but also the attribute that gives rise to this power—namely, divine compassion.

Another line from the Gospels bears mention. (It happens to be a favorite of my friend and co-author, Amy Ekeh.) Jesus commands a man whose hand is crippled: "Stretch out your hand" (Mark 3:5). The man does so, and immediately his hand is restored. This account illustrates that Jesus, in his healing ministry, upholds the dignity and agency of those to whom he ministers. The man in need of healing was active, not passive, in the healing process. This empowerment, this engagement, is another manifestation of Jesus' healing work.

It is our hope that this book will enrich your encounter with these Gospel texts and, more importantly, assist you in receiving their healing effects.

Tom Stegman, SJ  
Weston, Massachusetts





As I type these words, the sun is setting behind the stand of trees outside my window. This is the time of day when “all those who had any who were sick . . . brought them to [Jesus]; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them” (Luke 4:40). This is the time of day when the compassion of Jesus reached the multitudes, when the people knew that the touch of his outstretched hand would change their lives forever. Who knows how many evenings they gathered around him as the sun set behind the trees? Who knows how many he touched, how untiring his compassion, as evening fell?

The healing ministry of Jesus is a rich and complex area for spiritual exploration. As we immerse ourselves in these stories—the rawness of exorcisms, the desperation of parents with sick children, the astonishing faith of the vulnerable—we may find ourselves changing right alongside those who are healed. Questions and doubts that have plagued us for years may give way to the fundamental reality of encounter with God. Our intense desire for healing, for the connections that make us whole, may find renewed hope in the sound of Jesus’ voice and the touch of his hand. Our hesitation to call out, our unwillingness to admit before all that we too are vulnerable, may finally find a voice as Jesus passes by. Then we will be ready to sit at the roadside with Bartimaeus and shout from the depths of our being, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47). And we too will be healed.

Amy Ekeh  
Milford, Connecticut



# *Reading the Healing Stories*

In addition to offering reflections on Jesus' healing ministry, this book also serves as a collection of the healing stories of the Gospels. Almost all of them are included here for your prayerful reflection.

As with any Gospel text, we come to these stories with some familiarity. We know the stories of Jesus and the people he encountered. And yet, the living Word always has something new to reveal to us. As you read these beautiful texts of encounter and accompaniment, strive with all your heart to read them as if for the first time. Let the smallest details sink in, let the images linger in your mind, let the people come to life. Meet their eyes and hear their voices. Look at the healer from Nazareth as though you've never seen him before. Breathe the stories! And let them breathe in you.

The Gospel accounts in this book generally follow the timeline of Jesus' ministry, from his earliest proclamation of the kingdom of God to his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. They are taken from all four Gospels, but you will

notice that many of them come from the Gospel of Mark. This is because when the same story is told by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is Mark that often gives us the most detailed account. And for our own imagining and reflecting, as we will see, these details are of tremendous value.

You'll find that several stories have more than one reflection connected with them. In these cases, we'll explore several facets of a single healing story.

For groups that are reading these reflections and discussing them together, you may wish to begin your discussions by sharing with one another your own reflections on the Gospel stories themselves. You will be amazed by what each of you notices, how others in your group speak about these stories, and what insights you generate together.

May Jesus the Healer grasp us by the hand as together we set out to explore his extraordinary healing ministry.



# *Reflections*





## ***Jesus Heals at Sunset***

*Luke 4:40*

**<sup>40</sup>As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them.**

# 1

## *At Sunset*

A beautiful scene in a single verse, Luke's image of Jesus healing at sunset in Capernaum takes our breath away. To have been there! But there is so much we can imagine.

First, the sick, those with "various kinds of diseases." For many of them, travel was hard. Some were in pain. Some were exhausted. But all of them were hoping.

Second, the loved ones of the sick, those who "brought them to him." If you have ever watched someone suffer, you know the stress and strain, the worry they carried with them. And you know the hope with which they came. Who knows how many miles they walked with their sick, to bring them to the healer from Nazareth?

Third, the sheer numbers! In Mark's version of this scene, he remarks that "the whole city was gathered around the door" of the house where Jesus was (1:33). *The whole city?* The desire for healing is strong.

Finally, Jesus. One doesn't suppose that Jesus had been sitting idle all day. So he must have been tired. But he didn't



turn away; he didn't stop. No, one by one he touched "each of them." We can only imagine the compassion that served as counterpoint to the hope of the people. Compassion that came from a well so deep that it gave no thought on this night to the numbers awaiting him in the next town—and the next, and the next. Compassion that knew no discouragement. Compassion that touched every single one.

It was sunset. The time of day when things begin to quiet down, when we are reminded of the rhythms of night and day, when we recall that an end does come and the light does not last forever. But across the sky are colors, beautiful colors. Across the hearts of the people, hope. Upon the mind of Jesus, love.

*He laid his hands on each of them and cured them.*

**Meditation:** The physical, created world can be a place of suffering, but it is also a place of profound compassion. Let the next sunset you see remind you of this scene from Luke's Gospel. Imagine yourself in the presence of Jesus as day gives way to night.

**Prayer:** Jesus, as the sun sets on this day, remind me of your tireless compassion, your willingness to touch me, your refusal to ever stop healing.





## ***The Kingdom of God Has Come Near***

*Mark 1:14-15*

**<sup>14</sup>Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”**

## 2

# *Start at the Beginning*

Fr. Frank Matera, longtime professor of New Testament at The Catholic University of America, was known for giving this assignment to new students of the Gospels:

1. Find some time and a quiet place to sit.
2. Forget everything you think you know about Jesus.
3. Read the Gospel of Mark from beginning to end.

I still remember exactly where I sat. I remember the quiet, the “forgetting,” the reading of Mark’s Gospel as though for the first time.

The experience was nothing short of shocking. It was exciting, eye-opening, transformative. As I took in the entire Gospel in one sitting, it filled my imagination in a way it never had in bits and pieces. And the Jesus I met—he was not like the Jesus I had always known. He was grittier, more demanding, unflinching, driven. Everything he did and

said expressed urgency. His mission was not to inspire or to comfort. It was, to borrow a phrase from another Gospel, to light a fire on the earth—and to light it *now* (Luke 12:49).

Mark's Gospel was likely the earliest Gospel written, so it makes sense that it presents us with the rawest portrait of Jesus. While later Gospels tend to present Jesus as a bit more "above the fray," Mark doesn't shy away from realities like Jesus' anger, his physical hunger, his compassion so deep it was almost visceral. One of my students described Jesus in Mark's Gospel with the old Latin phrase *Veni, vidi, vici*: "I came, I saw, I conquered."

Jesus' mission in Mark is crystal clear. He came for one reason: to preach the good news of the kingdom of God (1:38). And preach he did, with words and with living. Indeed, after reminding his disciples that his purpose was to "proclaim the message," he was approached by a man with leprosy—kneeling, begging—and Jesus stretched out his hand. The healing, like almost everything in this fast-paced Gospel, is immediate.

When reflecting on the healing ministry of Jesus, we are best off starting at the beginning. And the beginning is the proclamation of the good news of God. Jesus embodied that message—one of urgent expectation and from-the-gut compassion, a message calling for the transformation of every hearer, the kind from which there is no going back.

*The kingdom of God has come near. The fire is burning.*

**Meditation:** Our response to the urgent proclamation of Jesus is faith. To respond in faith often requires a change of heart—thus Jesus’ call to “repent.” Repentance is not a guilty feeling. It is better understood as a change of direction. This change may be an emerging openness to the miraculous or a fresh resolve to believe that we deserve to be healed, to believe that the compassion of Jesus could actually be directed toward us.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you proclaimed a new way of life. To live it, I must be healed and whole. Grant me the grace of repentance, so I may let you change me.



## ***Jesus Heals a Man with an Unclean Spirit***

*Mark 1:21-26*

<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup>They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

<sup>23</sup>Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup>and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." <sup>25</sup>But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup>And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

### 3

## *The Holy One of God*

Mark's Gospel is known for its graphic scenes and vivid detail. This story from the earliest days of Jesus' public ministry is an excellent example. We can almost imagine ourselves there in the synagogue. It's a terrifying scene.

The story begins with an affirmation of Jesus' authority, which should prepare us for what follows. But it doesn't. I don't know that we can ever be prepared for evil.

It happens suddenly ("Just then," a translation of one of Mark's favorite Greek words, *euthys*, which means "immediately"). *Just then*, evil speaks. More accurately, evil "cries out." The unclean spirit addresses Jesus with two names: "Jesus of Nazareth" and "Holy One of God." One is personal—the name given to him by his parents, the place where he grew up. The second shocks even the reader, coming as it does so early in Mark's Gospel. Evil knows Jesus not only as a man but as God's own representative—sacred, set apart, holy, unique.



The spirit fears one thing—the same thing we all fear—death. Ceasing to exist. “Have you come to destroy us?” the spirit asks the Holy One.

In her book *Signs and Wonders*, Amy-Jill Levine notes that while on some level healing stories may comfort us, on a deeper level they make us nervous. I would venture to say they may even disturb us greatly. This is because healers put their fingers on evil. They literally touch it.

This is not a battle evil can win. And yet, the scene still sends a chill down our spines. We have seen, perhaps even felt, the unclean spirit of illness or brokenness. It does indeed cry out. It resists defeat. We are convulsed by it!

Praise God that Jesus of Nazareth is the Holy One. Praise God that his authority calls forth and silences even what shakes us to our core.

**Meditation:** Jesus’ words make it clear that he perceives two distinct beings before him: *the man* and *the unclean spirit*. Jesus says: “Be silent [unclean spirit], and come out of him [the man]!” Is there any area of your life where you feel that evil is creeping in, influencing you to be someone other than your true self? Is jealousy, resentment, anger, or pain controlling you in a way that feels invasive? Jesus has authority. Ask him to intervene.

**Prayer:** Jesus, Healer, cast out everything unclean in me.