

“Being A Healer

Deuteronomy 15:1-6 & Luke 4:14-30

October 7th, 2001 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

“Do not curse a deaf person or put something in front of a blind person so as to cause him or her to stumble over it. Have reverence for Me – I am the Lord your God.”¹ In the first text for today (Deuteronomy 15:1-6) the ancients were taught that in order for them to obtain God’s blessings, they had to make sure that no one in their midst was in need. There was a sense of kindness imbedded in the laws of the ancient Hebrews but compared to our capitalistic competitive Western culture, things have changed.²

The fact remains that we have millions of people living near or below the poverty line in our country. We have the so-called “working poor” who work hard but simply can’t make it with what they’re given for their work. Even though our nation has or uses 90% of the world’s resources with only 10% of the its population, . . . it is clear we are not sharing just from the fact that there are food surpluses but millions in the world are starving.



The general life expectancy of ancient Biblical peoples was closer to 60 with most people dying in their 50’s, many in their 40’s. In ancient Egyptian customs, “a prosperous life” was praised by saying that ‘so and so lived to be a hundred and ten years old.’ That age was ascribed to Joseph but language scholars note that because of their different calendar methodology then, he wasn’t actually that old.³

It’s difficult to say whether the Hebrews were healthier than we are today. Their outdoor living tended to make them healthy yet diseases

¹ from Leviticus 19:14

² Of course we live in a socialistic economy where through taxes and social security programs, many people have some means of health care provision

³ Similar advanced ages were ascribed to Seth, Enoch and others as symbols of their great lives but were not necessarily literal.

that scourged their ancient world have largely disappeared by our time. The infant mortality rate was extremely high in antiquity. One estimate claims that only 3 out of every 10 children born into a family could expect to survive to adulthood.



In ancient Hebrew thought, disease was interpreted as a divine punishment on individuals because of their sin. This way of thinking has been popular throughout all of the Biblical cultures. Right in front of Jesus, one day, His disciples looked at a man born blind and seriously asked Him, “Now was it this man’s or his parent’s sin that caused him to be born blind?”⁴ Notice their assumption that God is some sort of Tit for Tat get-even punitive God.

The faulty logic of religious leaders, through the centuries, was that since God was the all-powerful physician of people, they wrongly thought physical healing must be related to God’s forgiving someone of their sins. They thought and taught people that health and happiness would almost be guaranteed if you were pious and paid strict adherence to God’s commandments. The writers of Psalms and Proverbs taught this but this mentality was fiercely disputed by the writers of other wisdom books such as Ecclesiastes.

Some, through time, had thought that Moses may have been the patriarch of preventive medicine. They thought this because all of the original laws and decrees were attempts to obey God in order to live a healthier life. This thinking was woven throughout their mandated observances of the Sabbath, their dietary laws, circumcision, sexual hygiene and general sanitation regulations.



Moving into the first century, in what is considered to be Jesus’ first recorded sermon (in His home town), He ties Himself with the

⁴ John 9:1-5

prophecy that the Messiah is going to be a healer and liberator. Luke was the only gospel writer to include this account of Jesus' first sermon. That fact and also that Luke often provided unique accounts of His ministry to the poor and the outcasts, shows that Luke considered Jesus' life as a fulfillment of the healer-liberator messianic prophecy.

In Matthew's gospel, he also wrote so as to teach that Jesus' healing ministry was a fulfillment of what Isaiah had said. "He (that is Jesus) did this to make come true what the prophet Isaiah had said: 'He Himself took our sickness and carried away our diseases.'"⁵

From His teaching and personal responses to people's need, it is clear that Jesus thought God's purpose for human life is wholeness of body, mind and spirit. But this was a new and different way of thinking that contrasted with the popular mindset. This is what I mean.

The people who influenced the Greco-Roman culture thought that the human body is a prison for the human soul. In contrast, Jesus viewed the individual as an essential physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual unity. He was always concerned that a person be healed externally and internally.

Jesus was sitting at a well, once, talking with a woman from a Samaritan town. It happened that not only did she belong to the deeply hated Samaritan race, she had years of marital difficulties. But Jesus transformed that conversation from His initial request for a drink of water into a powerful therapeutic conversation. Within moments, He engaged her in a conversation that touched on her culture's religious history and belief and her own hope for personal fulfillment and quest for meaning and healing. Read John 4, when you get a chance and see Jesus' powerful engaging presence at work in that woman's life.

Everywhere Jesus went, He demonstrated a spontaneous expression of sympathy in healing people. He was the embodiment of the Presence

⁵ Isaiah 53

of the Kingdom of God. He was about wholeness in mind, body and spirit.

Jesus strongly argued against the thinking that sickness was sent by God as a punishment. God, He said, never treats us as we deserve but loves us unconditionally. Jesus never told suffers that they are undergoing hardships in order to learn courage or patience.⁶

Jesus brought as much healing to the mind as He did to the body. The core collection of His often repeated itinerant teaching lessons, the so-called Sermon on the Mount," contains a wealth of healing therapy for emotional conflict, resentment, fear, anxiety and hatred. We've also learned from the medical community in our time that the conflicts that take place in our minds are the cause of our immune system malfunctions and the disease process. This is because our body, mind, emotion and spirit are intricately tied together.

You got a quick reminder of this recently when medical people noted the dramatic increase of colds and flu because of the stress and anxiety that resulted from the terrorist acts in September. Our immune systems were compromised and we got sick.

The point of all this is that for a brief time, the Kingdom of God came to earth in Jesus Christ. Thousands saw just what existence should be like in the model of Jesus. Hundreds closely saw the wholeness in mind, body and spirit Jesus offered and were willing to die for their belief in Jesus' authenticity – for their belief that they had seen and been with God.



One day when He was at a funeral for His friend Lazarus (Mary and Martha's brother), Jesus stood among His friends, seeing the ugliness and despair of death and He wept. God wept. He cried over the tremendous contrast between what life should be and how life is.

For anyone who has even a marginal involvement with others, there have to be times of despair of the suffering and pain people

⁶ Once, a man in pain raised the possibility that it might not, after all, be Jesus' will to heal him of his plight. Luke 5:12f

experience. It is why people in helping professions get burned out and just can't take it anymore. But maybe it is some sort of a protection mechanism in us that we tend to adopt a grim fatalism about the possibility of healing.

We have convinced ourselves that if we throw our money at the best of physicians and surgeons, say a prayer, all we can hope for is *maybe* a positive outcome. We don't really expect healing, do we? We sort of fondly look back to the days when Jesus was physically on earth and say to ourselves, "My, those few hundred healed individuals Jesus touched were lucky, weren't they?"

When we talk about healing taking place today, it is usually a theological topic under discussion. We tacitly assume that God has the power to heal people today but *we wrongly think that if healing takes place, it certainly has nothing to do with us because that's God's business.*



We can take part in healing. We can become involved when *we break the cycle of decline and disconnection.*

The cycle we all experience is this. As we age, we experience a decline of our bodies. Our activities decrease as our bodies lose their ability to be all that they once were. If you exercise regularly, maintain excellent nutrition and stay socially and emotionally connected with others, you gain on an extra ten or fifteen years.

Some of us experience this predictable decline much earlier through accidents, disease or even congenital mishaps. Eventually, for all of us, we begin to gravitate toward homeward activities. We don't go out as much.

Some people in their elderly years stop being active and the television and radio become more their focus than people. Studies consistently show that there is a direct relationship between getting senile and withdrawing from social contact. In other words, as people withdraw from society, they lose their ability to use their mind and grow – but this need not be the case. All of our nursing homes try desperately to keep social contact

going for even their deaf and blind residents. But as our legs, eyes or hearing start to fade, we find it more difficult to attend social functions in which we once may have been so active. So we suffer physically and even more intensely, we suffer emotionally and mentally. We are overcome with feelings of loneliness and abandonment and we feel useless. For every one of us there is an inward prayer: "God, may I never be a burden to my children or friends."

The point here is that every one of us is a temporarily able-bodied person. No matter how often we just block it out of our minds, we're not going out of this life with the body of a 20 year old athlete in his or her prime.

On one occasion, a woman who was chronically upset by worries about dying – particularly that someone she loved might die – approached the Dalai Lama for a conversation.⁷ After carefully and empathically listening to the woman, he finally said to her "It is good to think about it (death) a lot."

That reply probably would be judged by some as trite or morbid, especially since our American culture tends to constantly reassure people that they don't have to worry about it. Even the surgeons – who tend to overuse their mechanical and methodological skill sets often to the disuse of communication and empathy abilities – will almost always tell you (after surgery) that "they got it all" and how "they didn't see anything." These kinds of statements, these days, are almost meaningless until they get back the lab reports. They simply don't want to have to face the possibility of death with someone else because they would have to do so on a regular basis.

Jesus tried to teach about the impermanence of life and the superior focus of God's Kingdom over the temporary fleeting culture in which we live. Thinking about and fully facing the impermanence of things in our lives more quickly puts us in touch with what is more important than

⁷ So recounts Tara Bennett-Golemann in *Emotional Alchemy* ISBN: -0609607529, pp.278ff

any THING or possession in our lives. But we don't want to part with anything, do we?

Changes and losses are difficult and painful for all of us. If anything, the September killings forced all of us to get back in touch with the fact that life is temporary and short. And by reflecting on our own impermanence, it softens our heart and enables us to be more open to others and open to more of life. We can have a new perspective on life and our purpose in life.

We abandon our old ways of seeing things and make ourselves open to new perspectives. New ways of looking at our day move us away from getting and spending and insuring and preserving. We have new ways of living our hours so that we see our limited time to live as an opportunity to make a genuine difference in the lives of others however we can. From contemplating our own impermanence, we can more intentionally and mindfully step out on our spiritual journey – realizing that we're wasting our time and our lives and talents if we continue to play with the TV remote and do absolutely nothing that will bring anything into another person's life. We get out of the easy chair and stop thinking that nothing we do could matter.

As Christians, we can break that cycle. I think there are a couple of things we specifically can do to become healers.

When was the last time you visited a person who is limited to being in her or his house? Those of you in this church who are Member Care Leaders can be actively involved in staying in communication with the households you have. Your phone call to see how things are going and if there is anything we as a church can do for the household can brighten anyone's day. Are you staying in touch with your people?

One thing you've already been doing is using the previous investment of making this an accessible church building. Someone in a wheelchair can come in and we can be with them. Now you've got to remodel the restrooms to make them accessible and I hope the leadership emerges to make that happen soon. Someone take this on as a mission project and you'll see that the

Session will be behind it and it will only take a couple of grand.

Many of you are regularly walking and in the winter, you're teaming up and doing laps in the mall, despite the snow. You're taking care of your own body which enables you to help someone else in need. Some of you are enrolled in yoga classes, keeping your bodies limber and you're meditating – which is doing wonders for your immune system and your spiritual life. Speak to me to find out more about that.

Many of you are involved in various ministry aspects of the church – whether serving on a board or helping to make the events come about. If you see something announced in the bulletins that in any way could relate to what you can and like to do, ask about it. You could contribute an ability or some money you have – even for a one time event. Not everything in a church means an automatic monthly meeting for the rest of your life.

Every minute you're involved with another person, whether in your neighborhood or through a church project, you can be involved in healing. By touching other's lives, you heal them and you experience healing yourself.

You can personally be a healing agent used by God but you have to do it. It didn't just happen in the first century when Jesus was visibly in our midst. It happens now because God's Spirit is in you at this moment and every place you go today and this week, God is right there beside you, hoping to use you for healing purposes. Be open for your next opportunity because God wants you to be ready. 🙏

