



Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany(C)
February 17, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

As if I had not read or heard this passage from the Gospel of Luke before, the word, “level”, jumped out in an unusual way. In Luke, Jesus “stands on ‘a level place’” (or ‘a plain’). The Gospel of Matthew sets a similar sermon ‘on a mount’ to emphasize that Jesus received those teachings from God (Matthew 5-7). The geographical setting has a different function in the Gospel of Luke...”

(Ronald J. Allen at https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3960)

A scholar tells us that in the Hebrew Scriptures, “‘level’ often refers to places of corpses, disgrace, idolatry, suffering, misery, hunger, annihilation, and mourning (see Jeremiah 9:22; 14:18; 30:4; Daniel 3:1; Joel 1:10, 20; 2: 22; 3:19; Habakkuk 3:17; Zechariah 12:11).” (Ronald J. Allen at https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3960) In the context of Jesus on “a level place” or “plain”, the healing power of Jesus can more easily be seen against a backdrop of suffering in life.

As I reflected on the Gospel, I thought about Jesus, the Healer. Jesus was a prophet, a teacher and a healer. The first half of today’s Gospel is clearly about Jesus as healer. I asked myself the question, do I, do we, need to be reminded and assured that there is healing power in Jesus?

Some of us may want to experience a dramatic healing from a disease, from surgery, from a physical injury, from an emotional injury, from a broken relationship and the list goes on. For me, I have come to believe that there is healing in a much less dramatic fashion than some of the great healing events in Scripture.

For instance, the raising of Lazarus from the dead is a dramatic event to be sure. We tend to focus on Jesus calling Lazarus forth from the tomb. Lazarus did rise and was restored to life. Beyond Lazarus, was there not healing for Martha and Mary, their other family members and friends, a kind of ripple effect, if you will?

Sometimes in matters of the heart, healing takes years to accomplish. Broken relationships and divorces often leave individuals and families with wounds in need of healing. Some if not many of us have experienced words and/or actions that pieced the heart and left the heart in need of healing.

On Tuesdays at the Noon Eucharist, we offer brief prayers for healing. I use a very simply prayer along with consecrated oil known as chrism, the same chrism which is found in the receptacle above the Tabernacle in the Chancel.

When I make the Sign of the Cross on each forehead, I pray, “May Almighty God have mercy on you, bring you healing and wholeness of mind, body and spirit, in the †Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Some of us need the healing of the body while others of us may need healing of the mind or the spirit.

What might the healing of the mind mean? For me, there are memories from my past which are in need of healing. I’d like to think that some memories are in the past and will stay there. In the twinkling of an eye, a painful memory can surface. Ever had that experience? What do we do when that happens? Can we learn to invite Jesus into the memory and pray for healing, insight and reconciliation?

What might the healing of the spirit mean? For me, there are some individuals who have wounded my spirit, my soul. Words and actions can cut deep into the human psyche, and one's spirit can be wounded. Ever had that experience? What do we do when that happens? Can we learn to invite Jesus into that 'woundedness' and pray for healing and an ability to let go in order to move on?

In the Gospel, Jesus is experienced as a powerful healer. He seems to have had a power within him that healed even those seeking to simply touch his garments. He seems to have had an other worldly power that could and did heal those who followed him to the 'level place'. They came in their brokenness to be experience him, to hear him preach and to be healed.

The four beatitudes, those "blessed" statements, follow the healing in the Gospel. They serve as examples of what life is like when some of 'stuff' of life is cut away. The passage's 'woes' are jarring and troubling and conclude this complex portion of the sermon on a level plain.

In today's world, much healing is needed. Much blessedness is needed. Much goodness, honesty and truth are needed. Experiencing the on-going chaos in society especially in government, do we not long for healing and wholeness of mind, body and spirit? Do we not long to read a newspaper article or watch a news program which is uplifting and life giving instead of what we experience today?

We are in need of healing and wholeness. When we experience health of mind, body and spirit, we can go into the world and be a healing presence for those around us, for loved ones, for friends, for co-workers, for fellow students and for our community. If we truly believe that Jesus was a healer, then, can we also believe that Jesus can heal us and others today?

Along one of the hallways in Mary Free Bed hospital, there is a printed art piece among many pieces of art. It says, "It's like a miracle. No. It is a miracle."

Physicians, nurses, aids, medical technicians and medications can be seen as part of God's healing in the world. For who enables the mind to be illuminated with such knowledge that miracles occur on operating tables and through modern medicine but by the grace of God!

Beyond the healing profession as it is sometimes called, healing can and does take place between individuals, family members, loved ones and whole communities. When healing takes place even in small doses, we can give thanks to God. Healing can begin, as we are set on a path to wholeness through the grace of God working within us.

And what about those times in life when healing does not take place? I believe God invites us to invite God into those times of need. God can give us the comfort and strength we need to be sustained even in our suffering.

If you are hurting or in pain of any kind, may the presence of God in this place begin a process of healing. May you experience the healing touch of Jesus, the lover of our souls, and the giver of himself that we and others might have life in abundance. Amen.