



Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
October 13, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

†May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

I would guess that most of us have heard the phrase, “Inquiring minds want to know”. Well, it would seem to me that a mind which is thirsty for knowledge and truth is a well-positioned organ of the body in search of accurate information. That said and because of the readings from Second Kings and the Gospel of Luke, I decided, and not for the first time, to search for a definition of ‘disease’. ‘Disease’ or dis-ease, can be seen as the word is the opposite of ‘ease’.

A medical dictionary related the following in describing ‘disease’: A disease is “an abnormal condition of a part, organ or system of an organism resulting from various causes, such as infection, inflammation, environmental factors, or genetic defect and characterized by an identifiable group of signs, symptoms or both.” (<https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/disease>) On one level, that’s a mouth full, but on another level, there probably isn’t an adult among us who hasn’t known someone who has had a disease of one kind or another. There are some of us who know all too well about “signs, symptoms or both” of a particular disease or chronic illness or injury.

Perhaps, you have seen the TV commercial on St. Jude’s Hospital in Memphis. At St. Jude’s, children work with medical professionals to overcome diseases especially cancer. Those little ones and their loving families are fully supported at St. Jude’s.

The DeVos Children’ Hospital just up the hill from St. Mark’s is a well-respected children’s hospital. There as at St. Jude’s, medical professionals are the hands and heart of the ‘healing profession’.

The medical profession has great hopes for the cure of many diseases. One of those which impacts millions of people is Alzheimer’s, a disease which robs an individual of cognitive skills over a period of time. It is a disease with no cure at the moment.

Our Scripture readings point to people with real diseases. In ancient times, people knew little about chronic illnesses such as diseases. People with diseases such as leprosy were typically outcasts of society. There was great fear and a lack of understanding of the root causes and effects of diseases such as leprosy.

Today’s Hebrew Scripture passage is about healing. The reluctant Naaman finally did what was requested and was healed.

In the Gospel, ten lepers approached Jesus, not one, but ten. They were all instructed to do something which seems rather simple. All ten were healed but only one returned to offer thanks to Jesus.

Now a homily could go on from there to be a homily on gratitude and giving thanks. I preached such a homily not long ago. I do my best to be thankful every Sunday for your presence here in worship. I am also thankful for those who serve on the various ministries and who volunteer here at St. Mark’s.

For two days this past week, the entire clergy of St. Mark's and spouses attended a conference on Mackinac Island. The Amen Conference is a clergy conference for all four dioceses in Michigan. The Conference was held at The Grand Hotel only because the current owners, who are Episcopalians, offer the Grand at an amazing reduced rate. This year's conference had a special guest. That guest was the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Bishop Michael Curry.

Bishop Curry is known for his powerful preaching about 'crazy Episcopalian's in love with Jesus and the 'Beloved Community' to which we are all called. His preaching at the most recent royal wedding brought international attention to his consistent message about love. To be in Bishop Curry's presence is to be the presence of someone on fire with the love of Jesus fueled by the power of Holy Spirit.

The Bishop's messages are engaging, captivating and motivating. His preaching and teaching stir the human heart because his heart seems to beat with the heart of Jesus. His goal is to help set the Church on fire with a new sense of Pentecost and the need for today's church to help overcome the challenges of today's world.

Bishop Curry reminded us that Neo-Nazism, white supremacy, racism and hate are borne out of fear for the 'other'. As Christians, we are called to combat and heal that fear with love. We are called to open our minds and hearts to the love of God in Jesus.

Jesus, the very love of God made incarnate in the world, came in to the world to bring us a new commandment. That commandment is to love one another as we are loved by God.

As I reflected on today's passages about disease, it seemed to me that hate can be a kind of disease that robs the human person of love. It takes energy. It drains the spirit. It changes personalities. It is destructive.

The good news is that that particular malady can be healed through love. For some of us, love doesn't come easy. For some of us, we were born into and perhaps lived within a family system in which love and expressions of love were not easily found. For some of us, we might need to search deep within ourselves to identify and claim aspects of our lives which need to be healed and made whole.

I believe the purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ is to do our best to make present the love of Jesus in our hearts and in the world. We are called to love one another as Jesus loves us even when it is not easy. We are called to be people of forgiveness and reconciliation. We are called to be the Beloved Community of God as demonstrated by Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you were here last week, I hope you experienced an amazing demonstration of love and the Holy Spirit. Here, we blessed some forty pets of one kind or another including a pair of hermit crabs.

If you are attending today's 183 Anniversary celebration of St. Mark's, I hope you will experience an amazing demonstration of love and the Holy Spirit. Nearly one hundred and eighty of us will have an experience of celebration for which I'm sure we will be grateful.

I believe we are here this morning to celebrate the love of God in Jesus. That love can be life-changing and transformative if we let it. That love can give us strength for the journey of life and enable the healing presence of Jesus in our lives and the lives of others. May it be so, and may all of us experience the healing power of God's love today and every day. Amen.