

Sermon – Healing Prayer

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Recently, I had the joy of visiting a friend in the hospital. She had gastric by-pass surgery and is on the road to recovery.

I say “joy” about the visit because I actually do enjoy visiting people in the hospital. Many find a visit to the hospital to be a fearful event since there are a lot of very serious things going on in a hospital. This is true.

Many medical professionals tell their patients to stay away from hospitals at all costs since there is the potential for the spread of germs and disease. I guess this is also true.

Those of you that have chosen the medical profession know that there is a lot of pain and suffering, but there is also a lot of joy, love and healing.

Medical care is rather amazing. I am grateful that we are able to find new and improved ways to alleviate suffering and pain and actually cure and heal things that for so long were a mystery.

Now, having been a hospital chaplain, I am firmly convicted that healing needs to encompass not just our bodies, but also our minds and spirits.

I look at body, mind and spirit as three components of a person – three parts of self. These three parts are connected and inter-related and when one component is suffering, then it can impact the other two. Conversely, as one component of self is healing then it can also help lift up the other parts.

The Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD suffered by so many that have returned from the wars in the Middle East, this PTSD is a reminder that healing is not just about body.

Today's Gospel reading from Luke is about healing.

“Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.”

As I listen to this passage, I am not sure if the healing occurs for the woman's mind or body or both.

We have many stories in the Gospels that illustrate the power Jesus has over all aspects of nature including the power to heal body, mind, and spirit and even the reversal of death.

These stories of healing can be a comfort to us because they remind us that God is in charge and that healing and even miraculous healing is part of this world.

Sometimes the tumors go away for good.

Sometimes the severe asthma does not come back.

Sometimes the bones and tendons knit back together and we can walk again.

However, sometimes these stories of healing raise a lot of questions in my own mind.

When I need it, what do I have to do to be healed or to have those I love healed by God?

And, sometimes the more difficult question is to understand why some do not receive healing.

Now I don't raise these questions to be a downer or to cause distress. Instead, I raise these questions to give voice to the circumstances of life that most of us have experienced.

Life can be difficult.

Life can be unfair.

Bad things can happen to good people, and vice versa.

Often as I visit people in the hospital or in their homes, we talk about these tough questions.

And, often as I visit with people we do a lot of praying.

I believe that prayer is one of the most important things that we do in life. There are many forms of prayers, some with words and some without words. In all forms, I look at prayer as a conversation with God and as a way to strengthen our relationship with God. Prayer does not change God, but at its best it can certainly change us.

Prayer is meant to be an honest conversation with God about things that are on our hearts. I don't think prayer is meant to be overly pious or saccharine. You know what I mean about that overly sweet prayer that we sometimes hear.

Prayer is meant to be honest. If we are angry with someone, then pray to God about it. If we desire something, then pray to God about it. If you feel hopeless then pray to God about it. If you are filled with joy and gratitude, then pray to God about it.

If you want healing from illness, disease or accidents, then pray to God about it.

Healing prayer is incredibly powerful and incredibly intimate. It is a very vulnerable state in which a person is opening themselves up to their inner needs and hopes.

For me, doing healing prayer with a person is an honor and a privilege.

Now, I have learned at least three things when visiting a person in the hospital or in their home. I share these three things since they may be useful to you in your own ministries. Some of you may recall that I have shared these words of wisdom before.

First, ask if a person wants prayer. As I said, healing prayer can be very intimate and diving in with prayer, when you haven't been asked, is an intrusion. So, I ask if a person wants prayer.

Second, I ask what a person wants to have included in the prayer. If a person has transitioned to hospice care then they may not want prayers for healing but may want prayers for other things instead, like control of pain and peace of mind.

Third, some people need to be given permission to ask for prayers for themselves. Some grew up in the Depression era and just don't like to ask for things for themselves. But, it is OK. And, some are so used to helping others that they don't know how to ask for help for themselves. And, some are afraid the answer to their request for healing will be "no" and this feels like rejection.

In this instance, it is important to remind people of God's eternal and unchanging love. God is always embracing us, even when we don't see it. We don't need to be good enough to earn God's love. Two thousand years ago Jesus took care of healing our relationship with God. God is never going to reject us. Though we sometimes conflate the two, an answer of "no" from God is not a rejection.

Now, here are a couple of other things that can keep us from praying. Sometimes we are afraid that we don't have enough faith and that the need for healing is evidence of a lack of faith. Or, if you are sick then you must have done something wrong or it is

punishment from God. To me, these are a blame the victim mentality and these stumbling blocks need to be overcome. Like today's Gospel lesson, over and over Jesus is shown helping those in need and walking with those who suffer.

Finally, there is a belief that healing can only occur through the secular medical systems or through medication. We often don't believe that God will work directly through a person to provide healing. However, the healing ministry of Jesus is evidence of his divine nature and evidence of our calling to continue to care for and heal the sick. This is not only healing of the body, but also of the mind and spirit. Healing prayer does not replace medical care, but it can come alongside and provide a boost.

Now, on some Sunday mornings, like today, during our ten o'clock service, we have healing prayer available to you. During the Eucharist we have folks in the back who are available to pray with you. And, you are welcomed to call the parish office, or Dcn. Susan, or me when you have a prayer or healing need.

In addition, we have a prayer chain here at the Parish. There are about a forty of us on the prayer chain, and we are happy to know of your prayer needs so that we can be praying for you. And in a few minutes we will be doing our Prayers of the People which includes intercessory prayers that have been written in the prayer book on the shelf in the back. I welcome you to write your prayer needs in that book so that we can all pray.

Finally, if you are feeling called to be part of visitation ministries or prayer ministries, then let one of us know, and we can help get you equipped and engaged.

However, healing prayer is not just for a few. God works through all of us to provide healing. We must have the desire for healing, the belief that it is possible, and take the action through prayer to ask for healing. We must be open to the workings of the Holy Spirit and be willing to take the risk that the response might be different than we desire. We must be willing to share the pain of the suffering and continue praying when healing is not evident. Sometimes healing prayer shows a person they are not alone. God is with them, and so are we.

As I close I want to share a couple classic-healing prayers that you might use when needed. Notice how these prayers fit in with some of the thoughts I have just shared. These are prayers that you can find in our Book of Common Prayer, that you have in the pews in front of you. Take a red prayer book and turn to page 458.

Here is a prayer **For Recovery from Sickness**

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers: Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant the help of your power, that *her* sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

And, on the bottom of the facing page here is a prayer **For Strength and Confidence**

Heavenly Father, giver of life and health: Comfort and relieve your sick servant, and give your power of healing to those who minister to *his* needs, that *he* may be strengthened in *his* weakness and have confidence in your loving care; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

And, and on the next page here is a prayer **For Doctors and Nurses**

Sanctify, O Lord, those whom you have called to the study and practice of the arts of healing, and to the prevention of disease and pain. Strengthen them by your life-giving Spirit that by their ministries the health of the community may be promoted and your creation glorified; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

And finally here is a prayer of **Thanksgiving for a Beginning of Recovery**

O Lord, your compassions never fail and your mercies are new every morning: We give you thanks for giving our sister both relief from pain and hope of health renewed. Continue in *her*, we pray, the good work you have begun; that *she*, daily increasing in bodily strength, and rejoicing in your goodness, may so order *her* life and conduct that *she* may always think and do those things that please you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Holy Spirit of God calls all of us to walk with those that are in need of healing. May WE be the hands and feet and voice of Christ in the South County and in the world and with those in need of healing.