

Year C, July 7, 2019
4 Pentecost (Proper 9)
Christ Church, Mexia

"A man had a terribly lengthy surgery – It was expensive and the results weren't very promising. He went to his doctor for the post-op visit, and the doctor said, 'Well, I have some sad news for you. You're not going to live more than six months.' And the man replied, 'Good (grief), doc. It's gonna take me (at least) a year to pay back what I owe you (for the surgery).' Then the doctor said, 'Well, I'll give you a year then.'" (*Preaching* magazine, Jul-Aug 1989)

Healing is the topic suggested to me by the readings for today. And for our purposes today, I want to suggest that healing is different than curing. To cure is to restore the physical body to a sound or healthy condition. Whereas healing is much more encompassing, including the spiritual and emotional as well as the physical.

An example of healing was given to us in the OT reading. Naamen is cured of his leprosy; that is clear from the reading. Unfortunately, the reading ended at verse 14 – if it had continued through verse 15, we would know that "Then he returned to the man of God (Elisha), he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel...'" So Naamen was healed – he came to know God through his cure. He was not cured because he believed; rather he believed because he was cured. This is just one of the points, but a very important one, that I'd like for you to remember from this particular story.

Another is that none of the powerful characters, - the kings, the prophet, the general had a major part in the healing story. It was the captured servant girl, a slave, who suggested to his wife that Naaman go to see Elisha, and his wife who delivered the message. The servants of the general are the ones who convinced him to do as Elisha had said – bathe in the Jordan.

Naaman came with great wealth expecting to pay for the cure from the prophet. But Elisha doesn't even meet with him; and ultimately it was God who healed him, an enemy and conqueror of part of the state of Israel, a non-believer. So, God's mercy is for everyone – at no cost.

Mike Attas, a Waco cardiologist and an Episcopal priest, who started a pre-med program based on spirituality at Baylor and who has written

guest columns for the Waco newspaper, wrote several years ago of the relationship between spirituality and physical health. He told of a couple who owned a family farm. Although they had physical health issues, what was really troubling them was the fact that their only son was dying of AIDs – they were struggling with the knowledge that he was gay. It was too much for them to understand.

In their minds their son and their health were unrelated. Yet after several visits when Mike spoke with them about the issues of forgiveness, tolerance, dignity, justice and healing, both of the parents seemed to grow younger and healthier before his eyes. Instead of asking “why?’ they began to see that the power of their belief was a way out of darkness. Mike wrote, “They taught me a simple truth – the spiritual life and the biological life are intimately connected. ...our souls and our bodies... are two expressions of one divine reality.”

When I was involved with the healing ministry at St. Paul’s in Waco years ago, I had a similar experience. Three of us were attending to a woman who had come from another area for the training session, so we really had just met. She had a severe case of rheumatoid arthritis. As we were praying for her, I was facing her holding both of her hands in mine. The other two were beside her with their hands on her shoulders or back. As we prayed, I began to feel a warmth in my hands and arms and it seemed as if something was flowing between us, through our hands, and I felt as though her condition had something to do with the relationship between her and her son, from whom she was estranged. When it was my time to pray, I prayed that she might be able to talk to us openly about that relationship. She tensed and pulled back, and the connection was broken between us. Afterwards she whispered to me that she just couldn’t talk to us because we were strangers, but she promised to speak with someone she knew at home, which I encouraged her to do. I never saw or heard of her again, but I firmly believe that her physical condition was caused or exacerbated by whatever had happened between her and her son. Ronald Reagan understood this concept, this connection between spiritual and physical. He said in 1981, after the assassination attempt, that he knew his physical healing was directly dependent on his ability to forgive John Hinckley.

Just as Jesus sent out the seventy in the gospel today, we are all sent into the world to help heal. There is unfortunately a great need for healing in the world today, and not all related to physical ailments. But remember, we are not the ones who can heal, it is only God who can do that, only God who knows what really needs to be healed, but

we serve as the conduits for God's power. And importantly, we don't need to convert them in order to heal them. We just need to be God's presence – like the people in the story from the Old Testament.

We are called to be part of the healing process in the world – just like Naaman's servant girl, who still had compassion for her captor. These are the lessons to consider for today.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.