

WHAT IS HEALING?

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Epiphany 6 – Cycle B: Mark 1:40-45

Healing can occur in many forms. It can be something as simple as putting on a band-aid over a cut to allow the wound to heal; or it can be going to a doctor to get some medicine; or going to see a doctor for help with mental a problem such as depression. Yes, there are many ways healing can take place and in different locations. These I've just described are more physical in nature. Today, though, I'm thinking of another form of healing that touches a deeper part of us.

This past week at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, we held a healing service. As most you may know, at this type of service we extend an invitation for people to come forward for the laying on of hands. Prayers are said and all those who are present pray for themselves, or their families and friends, asking God for help in providing comforting relief and healing grace. In the service, we pray for the health of the whole person.

As you know, part of my intern placement is at Trinity Village Care Center, and my function there is to be the chaplain, the spiritual care provider for all of the residents and staff. The residents there are in various stages of life. Most get some healing from medical professionals, the doctors and nurses. My ministry at Trinity Village is to provide settings to bring the community together, in worship, small group gatherings, what I call "coffee with the chaplain", and hymn-sings; something that the residents might have had prior to coming to Trinity Village. All of these gatherings are a form of healing for the residents.

I would like to share with you one such occurrence. I was leading a hymn sing and the hymn we were singing at the time was "Jesus Love Me". A resident, who usually does not participate in these programs, came over to me and started singing the hymn along with me; we sang a duet for the other residents. She then embraced me and said that this hymn was one that she grew up with. I share this story as it shows how in that particular moment healing took place. We sing that hymn often, as it provides the residents assurance that our Lord is with them always; and it is a hymn that most were raised knowing.

Most importantly, I try to provide healing for the whole person in their journey, especially as death nears by sitting with them, praying with them, holding their hands or placing my hand on their head. I have found that for the most part this provides comfort, a healing touch, a presence. Most importantly reminding them that they are not alone; that our Lord Jesus Christ is alongside them always, recalling the promise of Matthew 18:20 "for where two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them". In their fears, at times, they forget this fact, and when we remind them that Jesus is with us / with them, they are comforted, perhaps healed one might say.

In today's reading from Mark, we have another in the line of stories of Jesus' ministry of healing that began with the removing of the unclean spirit from a man in the synagogue at Capernaum, curing Simon's mother-in-law of a fever, and then healing others who were brought to him. In the reading today we can see a leper going to Jesus and begging him to help him, to make him clean. A person who has this disease would show definite signs of having leprosy; the skin would have sores all over. With those types of visible signs, this person would definitely be avoided by the people, afraid of become afflicted with the same disease, to be made unclean.

Where others might have told the leper to leave them alone, Jesus does not. Jesus doesn't even think about it. It is written that he showed pity for this person. Some theologians have substituted the word "pity" with "compassion". In this compassion, he touches this man, and the man is healed.

The healing that Jesus did to that person was not only removing leprosy, it healed much more; the person was reaccepted into the community, no longer an outcast. The whole person was healed. Being part of a community is important for many, it provides fellowship, support for the whole person.

Healing is taking place right here in this place. It happens when we come together as a community, to worship. When we hear the living Word of God in our readings and in our preaching; when we sing hymns, when we pray together; when we see the elements in the worship space – the cross, the font, and the altar; when we receive the bread and wine, we are healed. Our sins are forgiven, we are healed. It is in the gift of community in supporting each other that we are healed. It is in the compassion we have and

through the love that God gives us that we in turn give to others that we are able to be healed and become healers.

The leper doesn't just keep this "good news" to himself, he goes out to proclaim to everyone what has happened; he goes to spread the word. We are called to do the same; we are called to go forth and proclaim the living Word of God; we are called to be caregivers to those who are in need; right here or wherever we are.

We cannot promise others that we can heal them of what ails them, but what we can do is be with them, assure them they are not alone. We can share the love that God has given us.

In his book *A Spirituality of Care-Giving*, pastor and author Henri Nouwen wrote this describing the call we all have in providing care for others. He said, "To care is to cry out with those who are ill, confused, lonely, isolated, and forgotten and to recognize their pains in our own hearts. To care is to be present to those who suffer, and to stay present, even when nothing can be done to change their situation."