

March 30, 2017

Healing (Westminster Canterbury)

Psalm 23, John 9:1-41

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Today I want to talk about healing. It is a life-long thing. We spend our whole lives healing from a wide variety of afflictions, some are of the paper cut variety that get better in two days, some are the kind of diseases that one manages throughout a lifetime with medication, or diet, or exercise. You may remember that time you broke your arm as a child, or the three nights you spent in the ICU. We have accidents, we get sick, we are healed from this or that and then something else gets us with pain or aggravation again.

Now for the man born blind who regained his sight, the healing was dramatic. He wasn't going to forget about it – like we might wonder if we got the flu last five years ago, or ten. This healing was transformative, the kind where he walked away changed, more like the car accident you don't know how you survived, or the cancer that the doctors weren't sure they could remove successfully but did. He found himself on the other side of this healing with a story to tell, a miraculous story about how Jesus must have been a man of God to be able to give him his sight back.

We all have stories of healing to tell, some mundane, some probably as colorful as the man born blind receiving his sight. And we probably also have stories of loss to tell about the time the person we loved didn't get better, or how we prayed and prayed for healing to occur, and our hearing kept getting worse, or the ability to walk long distances never came back. Our bodies are meant to last a lifetime, but lifetimes run the range from short to long, and they still have an ending no matter how much healing we do or don't do in our years spent on this planet.

But since you are here today, or listening from your room, I bet that there has been a time, some time that you prayed for healing – either for yourself or for someone you loved very much. We are given a lot of confusing messages about what prayers for healing are supposed to do. Some believe that prayers are enough – and healing happens whenever God wants it to happen. Some believe that healing prayers work through the doctors and nurses and medical practices that have been known to be effective. Some believe that prayer is our way of telling God about our pain, and God is more than willing to listen to our laments. Some wonder if prayer “works” – but don’t really know how to describe if it works or doesn’t work – really. Is prayer “working” us getting what we want, or God working toward our good even if it’s not what we had in mind. Perhaps all these thoughts have come to mind at different times in your life. They have in mine.

I’m not sure that we have to get it all right or know exactly what we are doing when we pray for healing. I think it may be enough to share our concerns, even our bodily concerns with God.

What comes through loud and clear in Jesus’ ministry is that he cares about the physical state of our bodies and the emotional states of our minds – even as much as he cares about our spiritual well-being. Jesus healed the blind, the lame, the deformed, and the paralyzed. He healed multitudes of the sick in many places. He healed a girl who had been pronounced dead, and he healed a woman who had a flow of blood that wouldn’t stop for 12 years. He healed a man whose personalities were legion, and he cast out the evil spirit from a teenage boy (that’s a personal favorite). He fed his disciples a steady diet of spiritual nourishment, and he challenged religious authorities who were blocked by their own rules about when it was or wasn’t appropriate to do healing. He didn’t miss much. And that means he cares about you when your back is hurting again, or when your feet don’t move like they used to, or when your eyes get tired from reading long before you want them to, or when the nurse delivers the same 10 pills

you've been taking for years, and you're just sick and tired of not feeling the way you want to feel.

So we pray. We pray and we pray and we pray. We pray for our children. We pray for our neighbors. We pray for ourselves. We pray for those who work in health care, especially the people who take care of our daily needs. And we pray for those conditions in the world that make healing that much more difficult. In prayerful gratitude, we recognize what a blessing it is to live in a time and a place where the healing arts are what they have become.

So I'm going to invite you into a time of prayer – a time of reflection – when you can think about and pray for the kinds of healing that are on your mind and heart today. I will recite this prayer, slowly, line by line, to give you something to think about, and a time of silence for your own consideration. Each line will conclude with “Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.” You may join me in that common line if you like.

Jesus the Christ, our healer, our Savior, the reconciler of the world, we come to you with prayers for healing.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for something in your own life that needs healing right now.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray in gratitude for a time you experienced healing.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for someone else's healing.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray in gratitude for a loved one who received healing.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for doctors, nurses, EMTs, the care-giving staff here at Westminster Canterbury, that they may be uplifted in their healing ministries.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for those who are making local, state level, and national decisions about how health care is regulated and disseminated through laws and policies. I invite you to pray for wise minds and compassionate hearts as they make decisions that often affect the most vulnerable in our society the greatest.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for medical insurance providers and all who work in that industry and set up those systems which are intended to be a safety net. I invite you to pray for them that they may be guided by their love for people more than a love for profit.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for emotional healing. You may want to pray for forgiveness, so you can let go of old wounds. You may want to pray for connection, if your days have been lonely. You may want to pray for peace, if you are anxious or restless. You may want to pray for joy, if you find yourself consumed with sadness.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

I invite you to pray for spiritual healing. You may want to pray for acceptance for the way things are if they aren't what you would like them to be. You may want to pray for courage in the face of grief and loss. You may want to pray for the kind of peace Jesus offers that we might be prepared to face death, knowing that in his resurrection, he makes a promise that we will know eternal life.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Now for anything I might have missed – I invite you to pray for healing, of our polarized nation, of our fragile environment, of our violent history, or of any concern that is weighing heavy on your heart today. Jesus is the healer – and he knows us – and he loves us – and he wants us to know deep down that all shall be well.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

