

Date: February 14, 2021 (Epiphany 6)

1. Texts: 2 Kings 5:1-14; Ps. 30; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Mark 1:40-45.
2. Subject: healing.
3. Topic: our lived theology of healing.
4. Aim: educate.
5. Proposition: "God doesn't need our prayers for healing. We need to pray for healing."

HEALING IS COMPLEX

Healing is complex and complicated. We all know this. We've all had relatives and friends with cancer or Crone's Disease. Media reports describe children with life-threatening conditions that require outrageously expensive treatments. We weep over our elderly relatives whose dementia is slowly stealing their true identity. We pray for healing and see little evidence of it. It's all very complicated.

It's those two readings from today's lectionary that have inspired this sermon. Please pray that it does more good than harm.

Let's set the foundation for today by stating without hesitation that God's plan for each of us includes good health and wholeness. It is part of what it means to be created in the image of God. In addition, it is part of Jesus' own stated purpose, to bring us abundant life. And surely, God's original creation did not contain disease or syndromes. Health and wholeness are supposed to be part of what defines human life.

But you and I know that disease, disorder and death are parts of what it means to be human. All this stuff about God's original creation and plan remains theory. Our experience is that disease is a frequent companion throughout life.

So, faithful people pray and pray fervently. We pray for health, healing and wholeness.

And most frequently, it seems that God answers our prayers with a silent "No."

It's all very complicated.

But our foundation is God's original creation and plan. God created the world for health and wholeness. Thus, if anyone experiences any kind of healing, that is part of God's design. It doesn't matter whether that healing occurs through natural means, medical intervention or supernatural causes. Whatever healing we experience from whatever means, its source is God.

We know for certain that not everyone experiences healing and that no matter how hard we pray or how fervently we believe. We know far too many people who have died from cancer or who suffer from chronic illnesses like arthritis. We know people who suffer from depression or anxiety disorders. The alcoholic can stop drinking, sure, but the addiction never is healed. Not everyone experiences healing.

This reality is complicated by the fact of our prayers. We pray. We believe. We hope. But the only response we hear is silence.

It's complex and complicated.

We believe that God *could* heal everybody, but he chooses not to. This is his right. After all, he is the only being in all the universes whose choices are always and perfectly directed by love, justice, compassion, righteousness and perfect knowledge. If anyone is to make choices about healing, you and I want that person to be God.

It doesn't seem that God is primarily concerned with our illnesses, symptoms and syndromes. God is not focussed on what is happening to us. His concern is not the circumstances of our lives. Rather, God is much more concerned with who we are, with what kind of people we are. His concern is our character. God is focussed on who we are, which we prove by what we do.

So God is not focussed on our illnesses, symptoms and syndromes. His attention is focussed on our ability to love. He's watching over how we demonstrate God's life through our own lives. His concern is not what is happening to us, but what we do about what happens to us.

Our town floods, and God is watching for our generous response. Cancer invades our lives, and God looks for our compassionate care. Depression darkens our spirits, and God urges us to find acceptance and understanding.

Life happens around us and even to us. God looks for what kind of character we have. God looks for faith and love in us. When bad things happen, we prove who we are by the choices we make. This is God's concern.

One of our most frequent choices is to pray. This is a good choice and one for which God is looking. It demonstrates our faith, compassion and love. God is looking for such characteristics. This is good.

But, then, God seems to answer with a "No" most of the time. That hardly seems right to us. We are praying in faith. God could heal everybody every time. So, why does he say, "No"?

It is complicated.

We have to remember that our characters not our circumstances are his chief concern. Will we still love God with all that we are and love our neighbours in the same way even when God says, "No"?

Secondly, we cannot insist on supernatural healings. Even natural processes or medical interventions are rooted in God's wholeness.

Thirdly, the danger that we will become dependent on miracles for faith is very real. Having received one miraculous healing, will we judge our faith or God's existence by that healing?

Fourthly, it is equally likely that the healing might be misused to prove the spiritual superiority of either the one healed or the one who prayed for the healing.

And fifthly—for there might be even more reasons—there might be reasons inside the community of faith for which a miraculous healing must be avoided.

You see? It is complicated. It is only God who has the wisdom and knowledge to sort this out.

This means that his choices and reasons will ultimately remain a mystery to us. We do not have the spiritual means or knowledge to comprehend his actions. To try to comprehend his reasons is to drive ourselves crazy. Let's not even try.

Instead, let's reform our prayer. Oh, we still need to pray for healings. Our faith, love and compassion force us to pray. As we pray, we demonstrate our love for God and for others. We prove our compassion. We embody the faith of Christ. We still need to pray for healing.

But let's follow the guidance of the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven." Pray that God's will will be perfected in the lives of those for whom we pray. Pray that their characters will be more perfectly molded in the image of Jesus. Pray for courage, strength, faith and peace. Pray that their outward circumstances will lead to a renewed existence in Christ.

Pray these prayers for yourselves, too. When praying for the healing of others, we come to recognize that we need healing as well.

Healing is complicated. We all know that.

I think we can better cope if we surrender our need for the miraculous and our need to comprehend. We can better cope if we trust that God knows what he is doing. We can better cope if we admit our own limitations, and have that child-like faith so admired by Jesus. In fact, if we model our own lives more closely after Jesus' life—think about his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane—then we'll do very well in praying for healing, however complicated it is.

AMEN.