



Healing and Wholeness

(3rd in the sermon series New Year's Resolutions)

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; John 2:1-11; I Corinthians 12:4-11

Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 20th, 2019

First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois

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Text: Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. (Psalm 36: 5)

Healing and wholeness--the words conjure up all kinds of images in our minds. For those raised in church, the healing stories of Jesus come to mind--the healing of the Gerasene demoniac or the blind man by the side of the road--the one that the church camp song is about.

On this Sunday with the theme of "Healing and Wholeness" I want us to look at the nature of healing and wholeness as we seek a better understanding of how they apply to our lives and the lives of others, especially those whom we love dearly.

There are two kinds of healing: the physical and the spiritual. This is not a "cop out" but the truth.

A couple of weeks ago I cut a hunk off of the tip of my thumb while splitting a carrot for vegetable soup. Thumbs bleed and boy, did this one bleed. I've been reminded of this culinary accident several times a day as I try to button a shirt or open a can or do any number of things. Eventually it will get better. Eventually it will heal and even my "divit" will fill in!

Now, my thumb is minor in the vast scheme of life. I know that there are many people far worse off; people who are in constant pain, people who hope for and wait for a "silver bullet" to cure an illness - a medical miracle cure. I also know that many, if not all of us, pray at one time or another for "divine intervention," especially when someone we love is desperately sick. Too often those prayers are not answered and at some level we ask "why." Did we not have enough faith? Was the childhood Sunday School wrong or even a lie? The truth of the matter is, though, sometimes physical healing is not possible.

I believe that one of the most sobering stories in the bible is that of Jesus and Lazarus. As you may remember, Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. Jesus loved Lazarus and when he went to Lazarus' tomb, he wept. In a voice loud enough to wake the dead Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb and into his family. But here's the thing; Lazarus is no longer with us. Lazarus died. He is dead.

I have a half gallon of milk in my refrigerator. On the neck of the bottle there is an expiration date. "Best if used by..." it says. Oh, it may last a week longer but it has an expiration date clearly printed on the neck. We all have an expiration date. Some of us may have a better idea of when our expiration date is than others, but make no mistake, we all have an expiration date.

The clock of life is wound but once,
And no one has the power
To tell just when the hands will stop
At late or early hour.

There will come a time when “all of the king’s horses and all of the king’s men” will not be able to put us back together again.

There comes a time though, when physical healing is no longer possible. There comes a time when a well-worn garment can no longer be mended or a well-loved toy can no longer be repaired. But rather than discard a worn out body, God has a better plan. The Apostle Paul wrote about this in his first letter to the Corinthians.

“Lo, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye... For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality ... then shall come to pass the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?”

Physical healing is one kind of healing, but there is another kind of healing: “spiritual” healing. Spiritual healing is not dependent on physical health. This leads us to an understanding of “wholeness”.

My wife relaxes by making jigsaw puzzles. For the life of me I do not see how that can be relaxing but she gets lost in the process, and she recreates beautiful works of art. One thing, though, that drives her crazy is to lose a piece of the puzzle. When piece is missing we get down on our hands and knees like the old woman looking for the lost coin, often with flashlight in hand, running our hands over the carpet in search of the lost puzzle piece. With great joy, “the lost has been found” and the puzzle is now complete, whole.

“Wholeness” is to have that peace that the apostle Paul wrote about when he referred to a peace that surpasses understanding. It is a Christ-like peace seen in the Gethsemane’s garden where Jesus finally submitted to “not my will but thy will be done.” It is what Catherine Kubler-Ross called “acceptance”. It does not come easily, and I believe that there are times when it does not come at all.

We should always pray for physical healing, even for miracles. But we must also be willing to accept the fact that the time will come when such healing is not possible, and it has nothing to do the depth or quality of our faith or the faith of another. It’s just the way it is for we live in a broken and fallen world in need to redemption.

We should also pray for spiritual healing, especially when physical healing does not seem possible. I remember Ray and Linda, talented vocalists with a deep hard-won faith. Linda was diagnosed with a form of cancer that was hard to treat, let alone beat. The disease progressed along its predicted course. One day we were talking and they said to me that every night they would pray together. They’d pray for a miracle, but it never seemed to show up. Each day, though, they grew closer and closer. I mentioned to them that maybe the greater miracle was not that Linda be healed of her disease but that they rediscovered prayer and grew closer to each other, day by day.

We should always pray for physical healing. But we must also pray for spiritual healing - wholeness, as well.

Our lessons point to the intersection of physical and spiritual healing. Point to the nature of “wholeness”.

Isaiah spoke of God’s joy in His people. Those who the world calls “Forsaken” God’s “Delight” for God looks upon us with the delight that a bridegroom looks upon his bride when he sees her for the first time walking down the aisle.

The Psalm reminds us of God’s hesed or “steadfast love”; a love that never dims, never dies, and never lets us go. It is a love that “extends to the heavens”. God’s faithfulness extends “to the clouds” and beyond. It is a love that is not dependent upon us or our nature but the very nature of God who is love itself.

The Gospel lesson spoke of a wedding reception. God wants us to enjoy life. God does not want “Eeyore” Christians, followers who like Winnie the Pooh’s friend Eeyore only see Life’s thistles. “Rejoice in the Lord, again I say rejoice” the Psalmist sang. Our joy lies in the knowledge that in both life and death we belong to the Lord.

And finally, the Epistle lesson, the letter to the Corinthians. God has given to each one of us a spiritual gift to be shared “for the common good”. Together, not individually, but together we are the body of Christ here on earth. For as long as God in the Divine’s Infinite Wisdom gives us, we are to live lives that glorify God, especially in our community.

Amen.