

"Complete Healing"

Mark 1:29-39

February 5, 2012

Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany

This time of year seems to be when we experience a lot of sicknesses. Some sicknesses can be merely annoying – a hacking cough or a sinus headache. Some sicknesses can cause a lot of suffering – fever, diarrhea, vomiting, and so on. Some sicknesses can be quite serious and can even cause death, such as pneumonia which took the life of Evelyn Henselin and which has Dick Berg in its grasp now.

How do we deal with disease? First of all, we do a lot of moaning, groaning, and complaining. It's no fun to be sick. And when we are sick, we want to make sure that other people know we are sick.

Secondly, we take various medicines and seek treatment in order to get well. We put a lot of faith in science, medicine, and technology to heal us.

Thirdly, we pray to God to make us feel better and heal us. Maybe we pray first. Maybe we wait until all our other options are exhausted before we finally pray. I think we do this because we think that praying for physical health is so "unspiritual" and we wonder if God really cares for our bodies or just for our souls. And, if he cares, is our physical health as high a priority as our spiritual health?

Eventually, we seem to get well – most of the time. The only problem is that we will get sick again. All cures, it seems, are only temporary. If we live long enough without an accident taking our lives, some sickness or disease will eventually kill us. Is there no hope? Is there just a fatalistic feeling that sickness will eventually get us?

While thinking about that, we read today's Gospel reading and about Jesus wading right into sicknesses and diseases – and healing them. First, he heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. Then, it seems, the entire town hears about this and is at Simon Peter's front door with all of their sick

friends and relatives. The text says that Jesus “healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.”

Why is Jesus doing such an “unspiritual” thing? Is He trying to gain popularity? Does He simply feel sorry for people? Is His mission, as some people think, simply to care for people’s physical wants and needs? That’s not it at all.

Sickness and disease are not a normal and natural part of God’s creation. Nor are they simply a “physical” problem. God deals with us holistically. It is not a question of whether God cares for us spiritually or physically. Body and soul were both created by God. He cares for both of them.

Sickness affects both body and soul. In addition to causing great physical suffering, sickness is also a spiritual sign of sin – a reminder of evil and corruption which has been in our world and which has been in each of us since the time of Adam and Eve.

Jesus came, not just to save our souls or to simply take care of our physical needs. Jesus came to bring healing in the fullest sense of the word. But Jesus is not a dispassionate Doctor who diagnoses diseases and dispenses drugs from the sterile environment of heaven. He comes into this world and becomes one of us. And He does more than cure diseases. He takes them on Himself. In St. Matthew’s account of this story, Matthew says this healing was fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah which said, “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.”

In other words, Jesus took all of our sin and its corruptive powers upon Himself to the cross. On the cross, by His suffering and by His death, Jesus was able to leave them behind. For us, this is great good news. Isaiah describes our salvation in medical terms. He writes, “by his wounds we are healed.” The disease which sin caused between God and us has been healed. You have been healed. I have been healed.

But sometimes you don’t feel so healed. We still get sick. Our bodies still age and break down. Evelyn died and Dick lies close to death at this moment. But, instead of complaining when you are sick or interpreting illness as a sign of God’s indifference or lack of love, see sickness and disease as a very graphic reminder and sign of the sinfulness in which you still live this side of

heaven. This can be a helpful thing. It's like pain. Pain is not a pleasant experience. Yet pain is what tells you to take your hand off of a hot stove before it is burned and damaged. Sickness is not a pleasant experience. Yet, if sickness can help you remember your sinfulness and your mortality, this can be a powerful motivation to repent and seek the healing of God's forgiveness before you are lost forever.

Take the medicine which God gives you for your sin. This medicine is none other than the Word of God. The Word of God is not just descriptive, but it is prescriptive as well. It not only tells of the forgiveness and healing which Jesus won on the cross for you and me. It delivers that forgiveness as well. That healing is delivered in the Word with the water in baptism. That healing is delivered in the Word with the absolving, reading, and preaching. That healing is delivered with the bread and the wine in Holy Communion. St. Ignatius, a church father in the 1st century and a student of St. John, even described Holy Communion in medical terms. He said, "[It] is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote to prevent us from dying, but [which causes] that we should live for ever in Jesus Christ."

Living forever is the result of having been cured of sin. No sin means no sickness or corruption. No sickness and no corruption means perpetual life and health. You have been cured. Don't be fooled by the pain, sickness, aging, and even death which you experience now or which you see your loved ones experience now. Those things are not the disease. Those things are only the symptoms of the disease. The disease has been cured. By His wounds, you are healed, even when the symptoms remain.

Don't even be discouraged by the symptoms. Jesus' resurrection from the dead gives us hope and assurance, even when our bodies break down and fail. Jesus' beaten and bloody body was entombed for three days and emerged with power to live gloriously forever. It is this kind of body and life which Jesus has won for us, not the kind of body and life we have now. The Scripture promises that, at His return, "the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything

under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

(Philippians 3:20-21) What excitement and joy that will bring!

Our text says that, after a long day of healing sick people and casting demons out of possessed people, Jesus rose early to pray. When Simon Peter found Jesus praying, Jesus said that it was time to move on. He had to preach in other towns for that was why He came. In other words, Jesus did not come just to heal a few random people of their sicknesses. He came to proclaim the greater news that sin was to be defeated and righteousness restored; sickness was to be removed and health restored.

That is what we are about as a Church and as individual Christians. We are to pray for God’s strength and God’s Word and then we are to declare the health that Jesus came to bring. We help people with their sicknesses and other physical difficulties as a means to proclaiming the greater cure of body and soul through faith in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our church has a lot to offer our community or – better yet – God has a lot to offer our community through us. We do not offer merely eternal spiritual cures as if physical suffering here and now didn’t matter. Nor do we offer just short term temporary physical assistance as if spiritual needs were unimportant. Through the Word of God preached and taught here and shared and proclaimed there, God brings healing through His Son – healing of body and healing of soul – complete and everlasting healing. Amen.