

St. Luke (transferred) + October 15, 2017

Isaiah 35; James 5; Luke 4

Healing prayers are offered every Sunday. A healing prayer minister sits near the entrance to the chapel and anyone is welcome to go to that place either before or after receiving Communion. You may make your prayer requests known to the healing minister who keeps them in confidence, or you may say nothing at all and still receive the healing prayers. Then, with gestures that reach back to ancient times in the Christian tradition, the healing prayer minister speaks a word of prayer, lays his or her hands upon your head, and anoints you with the sacred oil for healing.

Once a year, we move the healing prayers out into the Assembly in our annual St. Luke Healing service. So, today, after receiving communion here on the floor level, you are welcome to go to one of several healing stations where a healing prayer minister will lay hands upon your head, speak words of prayer, and anoint you with the sacred oil.

Should you come for healing prayer, you may wish to pray for any number of things:

- you may feel sick, have an injury, suffer from a broken limb, or maybe you are carrying a disease within your body
- you may be feeling the pain that comes with the complexity of relationships – a troubled friendship or marriage or with another family member, estranged perhaps from someone you love or thought you loved, or feeling hurt by someone or misunderstood
- you may be caught up in guilt for having done something unwise or feeling regret for something you said
- your heart may ache over broken or brittle relationships in your sphere of daily life or for what you see happening to people throughout the city or nation or world
- you may be feeling alone or depressed or anxious
- you may come to prayer with a sense that your dreams and hopes and the dreams and hopes of your community go unfulfilled

We seek healing prayer for all kinds of reasons and we come seeking healing from God, trusting that it will not always be this way. We cling to the promise that *it will not always be this way*.

One day God will join heaven and earth as one. One day, as the poet Isaiah says, the lame will leap for joy, the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, the eyes of the blind will be opened, the tongues of the speechless will sing for joy. A new creation will be like waters bursting forth in a dry wilderness and streams in a parched desert. Exiles will return home. The displaced will be secure. The endangered will be safe. Nations will put down their swords and live in peace. An old, weary and worn out world will be transformed into something new.

One day, God will bring it to pass.

We wait for this day and we do not wait as those without hope. We do not wait in vacuum. For we already know something of God's healing power. For the reality of God's future reign of complete healing and wholeness has broken into the world now in Jesus Christ. Today.

The churchy word this wholeness and healing is “salvation.” And it is here now ... today. Today.

Jesus begins his ministry by announcing this good news. He is worshiping at the Synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. He rises to read a lesson and he searches for that passage in Isaiah where it says that the Spirit of God is on me –

to bring good news to the poor,
recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the prisoners and oppressed go free,
and proclaim the year of the Lords' favor

Jesus says the Spirit of God has anointed him to carry out these things.

There is stunned silence. All eyes are on Jesus. He sits down and then proclaims to all the Assembly: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Yes, we long for that done when it will be all-in-all, but today the content of God's agenda for healing a broken world has begun.

Does it feel that way? Is it noticeable or obvious? Or, are there days when it difficult to trust that this is so? Especially when we are overwhelmed by the changes and chances of life.

- We know the sting of grief and wonder if we will ever recover from the loss we feel over the ones we loved so every much
- We are not sure we will ever recover from that injury or ailment
- We wonder whether that person from whom we are estranged will ever speak to us again
- We're just not sure what it means to start over again with our homes or towns burned to the ground or laid waste by hurricane or earthquake or flood

Yet, Jesus says TODAY. Today, God's healing work has begun.

Britt and I returned from the Bay area yesterday. On Thursday, Britt received a special honor from the seminary she attended. The event was filled with joy and wonder and there was a pall of sadness and grief signified by the smoke that filled the air, thick smoke emanating from the fires that ravaged the Napa valley only forty or so miles away. The fire has taken the lives of over 30 people, destroyed acres and homes and in some cases entire small towns.

Some of our friends who were supposed to join us for the festivities could not come. Deirdre and Norm live in Sonoma where the fires were intense. They were evacuated, first from their homes in the hills and they were evacuated again from the whole area. Their homes were in great danger of being burned.

The smoke in the air was thick and so was the sense of loss and despair among so many people in and around the bay area.

On Friday, we took a couple of our friends up to the top of the Berkeley hills, to the place where I went to seminary. So, I showed them around what was once the campus of PLTS (Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary). PLTS had inhabited these beautiful sprawling grounds for

years and years but just this past year they had to downsize and sell the property. Financial realities kicked in. They now occupy a small suite of rooms and offices in a downtown building.

As we walked around the grounds, I felt sadness seeing the places where I once took classes, the dormitory where I once lived, the wonderful view of the Golden Gate Bridge we all enjoyed, and the beautiful chapel that was recently decommissioned. I commented to Britt and our friends that as we poked around the campus, it felt like we were poking around the ruins of Christendom.

The institutional church we once knew has diminished and in some places has gone away. The church isn't as big or as sustainable as it once was. Being on what was once the PLTS campus sort of felt that way.

What do we do with our losses and all those broken places?

We cannot deny the pain of the world or adopt a sort of Pollyanna attitude where it will all get better. And we know we cannot go back to the things they used to be.

Even as we count our losses and feel our pain and lament the sadness of the world, Jesus brings salvation and wholeness. Even with all that. Today?

Yes. This is the Gospel distinction? Amid all our losses and unfulfilled hopes and sadness and pain, we are loved.

We often suffer the illusion that we cannot be whole and well unless everything is spotless or perfect, including ourselves, but the Gospel distinction is that we need not harbor such an illusion.

We know healing and wholeness today even with all ailments or sadness or frustration or grief for the good news is that God does not wait for the world or any one person to have their act together before God loves them. The good news is that TODAY Jesus grant the Lords' favor. Today sins are forgiven. Today new life bursts forth even as we suffer loss. For we are loved as we are and not as we think we should be or as someone else thinks we ought to be. For God continues to touch us and God has joined us to a community of mutual love and called us to vocations of love and all of that takes place just the way we are. And here's the good news of God's healing work. Jesus, who takes us as we are, refuses to leave us where we are and works a miracle of transformation in our lives through the wonder of God's remarkable and generous love.

When we set high expectations for ourselves or others about how we should feel or act or behave, we buy into the notion that wellness means perfection or control and that it all somehow depends upon us, but the wholeness God brings in Jesus is a love that meets us where we are. Today.

We need not presume to be strong or righteous. We are free to surrender to God and pray with all our weakness.

Deirdre and Norm kept in touch with their friends through the drama of the fires and reported to us all that in the face of this terrific loss, they banded with other neighbors and essential

community and spot grew and flourished. They sent along the picture of a sign someone had posted amidst the ashes and smoke and fire: "The love in the air is thicker than the smoke."

The damage is done but redemptive healing is at work!

The old seminary campus was recently sold to a Muslim university. How remarkable! What we used to call "holy hill" may be called holy hill still. And PLTS, like many, many seminaries of the church now has opportunity to plow new ground. Perhaps the old powerful signs of Christendom are giving way to something humbler and more truthful, resonating in a deeper way with the values of Jesus. Who knows what God has in store?

When there are ruins or when there is loss or pain, God surely weeps like the rest of us, and in those places God's healing work takes place with death giving way to Resurrection. And Jesus insists on meeting us and loving us as we are. The Risen Jesus, you will recall, bears the wounds of the cross. The nail marks remain. They do not disappear. Christ, the healer, comes to us with all our wounds and he meets us with his wounds, with a love that is not alien to our human suffering. Curiously, life pours forth from these wounds! Christ's body broken for us. Christ blood poured out for us. Given freely and shared among us so that we will live as Christ's broken body for loved poured out for the world!

Surely, salvation has come among us this day. Today! Amen.