

When I was in college, I got very sick with a mysterious auto-immune disease that disrupted my life for many years. During that time, I moved to Mankato, Minnesota, to be near a particular doctor, and to also continue going to school there. And it just so happened that I have a great aunt who lives in a tiny rural community near there. I never really knew my great Aunt Margaret before then, but at my mother's persuading, I politely called upon her when I arrived. And over the next several months I made regular trips out to the farmhouse where Margaret lived.

It was a hard time in my life. I was really sick and scared. But every time I went to Aunt Margaret's house, I experienced healing.

She would set the table for me as though I was a prestigious guest, with the good dishes and cloth napkins. She would have been cooking for hours before I arrived. We would sit at her piano and sing hymns together, and she would tell me family stories I never knew before. And when I went to church with her, the pastor already knew me, because she had been praying for me long before I came.

Of course my Great Aunt Margaret was no physician. But she was certainly a healer. Aunt Margaret could not and did not cure my disease. But her acts of love – things I could see and feel -- brought me wellness and wholeness in spite of my illness.

Today we remember St Luke, who really was a physician, with a special service of healing. This is an opportunity for you to receive prayers for whatever ails your body or your spirit. And along with those prayers you'll be anointed with oil, a sign of promise and a symbol of healing.

And maybe you'll pray for a cure. And please, don't get me wrong, I believe in the power of prayer. I believe that we should lift people up to God and pray for them to get better – to be healed of illness so that they can live more abundantly and fully. And I do believe that sometimes, illnesses really are cured. And people recover.

But the truth is that healing doesn't always happen the way we want it to. And that's hard. It rocks our faith when we pray and pray for something to happen and it seems like God hasn't heard us. Or maybe – even worse – that God *has* heard us, but for some reason, decided not to act in our favor anyway. It hurts when we read stories in the Bible about the lame leaping and the blind seeing and the dead rising... but then it doesn't happen for *our* friend, or our parent, or our child. And our hearts break and we wonder where God is.

But friends, God is truly at work, healing the world every single moment. In fact, the *entire* story of God is about healing! From the beginning, human beings having been breaking stuff. We hurt one another; we hurt the earth; we hurt ourselves. And God is continually at work trying to heal us, to mend our brokenness, and repair our

relationships, and restore order, and turn us back to God and away from our bad habit of doing harm. If you consider any story from the Bible, any story, at its core you'll find a story of God trying to heal the world. That's the mission of God – to heal us. To heal all of creation.

In St Luke's Gospel we get a glimpse of God's vision for us – a vision where there really is wholeness for the world. We hear it right up front, in Mary's song, the Magnificat. In her song, Mary, the mother of Jesus, proclaims God's vision that the poor and lowly will be lifted up, and the mighty will be brought down a notch, and the prisoners will be set free and the oppressed will be freed and the hungry will be fed and the refugee will be housed. It's a vision of healing, isn't it?

And then, through the whole Gospel of Luke, Jesus goes about enacting this vision that Mary proclaimed – feeding the hungry, touching the untouchable, healing the sick, raising the lowly, forgiving sinners, humbling the powerful. Jesus enacts God's vision for wholeness on earth.

Today we heard the very first words from Luke's Gospel, where Luke addresses his story to Theophilus. "I've written this down for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you'd know the real story."

Now, Theophilus probably wasn't a specific person. No, Luke is more poetic than that. Theophilus literally means "friend of God." You see, this story is for you – it's for us. Because God knows that we need an orderly account of God's vision as we live in this chaotic world.

God knows that humans need tangible, visible things. Because, while God's vision for creation is clear, ours is always hazy – always obstructed by our own greed or fear or doubt. So God came to show us, in Christ, what this vision looks like. What it sounds and feels and tastes like. This is exactly why we were given Jesus – the Word made flesh – the vision made visible.

You also might have noticed that we got the very last part of Luke's Gospel today, too, where the disciples meet the risen Christ and he leaves them. He leaves them with the promise that they will be given power from above to actually go out, themselves, and enact God's vision on earth. And that part is for us, too. Through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, God's mission becomes ours.

So we come here today for tangible, visible things. For the laying on of hands and anointing. For bread and wine and water. All of these things are tangible signs of God's healing, loving purpose. And *more than* signs! They are a means through which we actually feel and experience the love and presence of God...because God knows we really need it.

Today you may come forward for individual prayers and anointing, and, you can also go to our Chapel and light a candle for someone else, or for the healing of the nations, or for the healing of creation.

Don't be afraid to ask for healing. I know that prayer is complicated, and sometimes we are reluctant to pray – maybe we don't know what to pray for, or we are scared that God won't answer, or maybe our prayer seems unimportant in the grand scheme of things. But we have an example in Jesus.

Even Jesus prayed that God might spare him the pain of the cross. A depiction of that prayer is actually on a window in our chapel. "If it be your will," Jesus prayed, "take this from me." Now, we know that that prayer wasn't answered in exactly the way Jesus might have hoped, in his moment of fear. He did have to die. But even in his death, healing happened.

This is true for us, too. We know that all things truly are healed, even if there isn't a cure.

My Aunt Margaret is in her final days on earth. See, she's been receiving blood transfusions for several months because of some internal bleeding. And of course she's been in everyone's prayers as she fought this disease inside her 96-year-old body. But a couple of weeks ago she asked the doctor what would happen if they didn't give her any more infusions. And he gently explained that she would get weaker and eventually fall asleep for the last time. And she said, "Good. I'm ready."

Aunt Margaret, and so many other saints in our lives, have taught us to trust in God's vision of healing.

So today, pray boldly. Trust in God's vision, and place your life in God's merciful, healing hands. Amen.