

The Divine Healing Touch

Text: Isaiah 40:21-31

1 Corinthians 9:16-23 (Series B, 5th Sunday after Epiphany) Ps. 147:1-11, 20

Mark 1:29-39

*He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up.
The fever left her, and she began to wait on them.*

Let us pray

Today's message deals with the subject that is dear to my heart and that is the healing of: **Mind, Soul, and Body**. Jesus is called to the bedside of Simon's mother-in-law. She has a fever. You might say that a fever is not a serious condition. That may be the case in these days of modern medicine but, in Jesus' times, to have a fever was a serious matter - it could've been fatal!

Jesus could have easily said, *"I came to preach about the Kingdom of God."* But watch what happens. He goes to Simon and Andrew's home. He tenderly takes the sick woman by the hand, helps her up, and the fever leaves her. Then she serves them coffee and some home-made lemon pie. Jesus' touch brings the gift of wholeness - then and now!

Mark, the gospel writer, puts together a portrait of what kind of person Jesus really was. Even though it was unlawful to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus worked probably late into the night as the sick were brought to him from near and far. People saw in Jesus someone who was more concerned with people than anything else. Here was a man with a heart, a heart full of love, grace, mercy, and compassion.

Mark is not simply telling us a nice story about someone with a fever who was healed. He is telling us something about what kind of person Jesus was, not only for the people of his time, but for people of all generations. These stories that are retold to us, in this ancient account, continue to be the same good news that is on the move in our times and lives. The *compassion* of Jesus was in his touch.

Our God is the one who reaches out to those who have any kind of need - he touches them with his healing hand. He touched the mother-in-law of Simon; he reached out and touched the sick and the possessed who came to be healed. He touched the eyes of the blind and ears of the deaf. He touched those who knelt before him and raised them to their feet saying, *"Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace!"*

Jesus reaches out and touches us with his healing power. He touches us on the head with water at our Baptism and makes us his own children. He touches our ears with his Word of hope and assurance. When we are depressed, upset, discouraged or grieving, he touches us with his comforting Word - the assurance that he will not abandon us in our troubles and the promise that he will always be our refuge and strength in times of trouble. He touches our consciences with words of forgiveness and the sign of the cross. He touches us with bread and wine and the real body and blood of Jesus that we eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins.

The Hebrew Scripture reading from Isaiah 40 reading this morning is a song about the greatness of God. It concludes with these wonderful words of reassurance and comfort, telling us that even though God is the all-powerful God who *"stretched out the sky like a curtain"*, created the stars, and reduced powerful rulers to nothing, God is a God who touches the lives of people with his love and compassion.

Isaiah says,

**“Don't you know? Haven't you heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God; he created all the world.
He never grows tired or weary. No one understands his thoughts.
He strengthens those who are weak and tired.
Even those who are young grow weak; young people can fall exhausted.
But those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed.
They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary;
they will walk and not grow weak” (40:28-31).**

There are times in our lives when our own strength is exhausted. There are those times when we are either emotionally, physically or spiritually drained, or perhaps all 3 at once. Isaiah uses words like ***"weary"***, ***"tired"***, ***"weak"***, and ***"exhausted"***. There comes a limit to what we can endure as human beings. Jesus talks about those who are *"weak and carrying heavy-burdens"*.

- ❖ We can feel weary for all kinds of reasons.
- ❖ We feel weary because there is tension at home or in our workplace.
- ❖ We are weary from some kind of illness that seems to go on and on.
- ❖ We are tired and exhausted because of unhappiness in our family, because we have lost someone dear, or because our finances are rock bottom.
- ❖ We are crushed by the guilt of having given in again and again to temptation.
- ❖ We are feeling weary and tired because of old age, and we are not as strong as we used to be.

Isaiah is speaking to *tired, weary, weak, exhausted* people like some of us this morning. He tells us about a God who reaches out and touches us in our tiredness and weariness.

“He strengthens those who are weak and tired.... Those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak.”

God reaches out and touches our lives and gives us a strength that is beyond what we can muster up. There is strength in knowing that we don't have to go at it alone, that we are never forgotten or ignored! We have a very special friend - Jesus - who watches over us at all times, cares for us at all times, and who is open to having us come and speak to him in prayer at all times.

He loves us! He forgives us! He will stand by us! He gives us something to hang on to and somewhere to turn even in the darkest moments in our lives! As Isaiah said: *"Those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed."* Or as the apostle Paul said, *"I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13).*

A lot of what happens in our lives is a lot like playing *Chopsticks* in a concert hall. The problems and the troubles we encounter exhaust us. Sometimes when we are ready to give up, the Lord comes along and leans over our shoulder and whispers in our ear, "*Don't quit. Keep going. I'll help you. Don't listen to the noise of discouragement.*" And in that moment, Jesus' presence, his love, his touch changes everything.

Christ is no longer visibly present with us, as in the days of the disciples, but that does not mean that the touching presence of Christ is no longer here in our world. This touching goes on today because Christ lives in us and is present with us as we reach out to those around us.

God's touch comes through our visit to the person in a *hospital bed* or in a *nursing home*, to the *shut-in*, the *lonely*, through our words of encouragement and prayers. God's touch reaches out to the person in *prison* loaded with all kinds of problems, and he uses our help, our prayers and support to ease their anxiety and depression.

God touches those who are burdened with a heavy conscience as we tell them of the wonderful liberating word of forgiveness in Christ. God's touch comes through an adult's care for a shy child who needs warmth and gentle encouragement.

God's touch is felt as people help and comfort those overburdened with life's problems. If any of you have been troubled by anxiety, difficult decisions, over-powering problems and have experienced the *kindness* and *compassion* of a friend or a stranger, you will know what it means to have someone reach out to you. If this has been your experience then you have experienced the healing touch of Jesus through that person.

The COVID-19 pandemic creates a dreadful world these days. Coronavirus has ravaged our globe with more than 2.3 million dead and counting. It has devastated families and communities, strained our health care system and left frontline workers, nurses, doctors etc. feeling tired, weary, weak, and exhausted.

The question begs asking... Why is God in the midst of a global COVID-19 pandemic? It is a good question but there are no simple answers; yet, as Christians, we can always HOPE, knowing that God is in control and God in Christ is with us, encouraging us to take refuge in the words of the prophet Isaiah 40:31

**"They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and
they shall walk, and not faint."**

Christ has taken us by the hand and raised us to new life so that we might love and serve him. We need to be available: we are his *hands*, his *feet*, his *lips*, his *eyes* and *ears*. God reaches out to others through us and, through us, touches people and makes them whole.

Let us honor the gifts of God, the healings, words, and works of Jesus, and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, by accepting our wings, soaring to new heights of commitment, and *proclaiming the message*. There are many directions in this life, but only One Way. There's a lot of lifting going on in these readings but we only have the light work. Haven't you heard? Just *lift up your eyes and see!*

**May the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

Black History Month

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Lift Every Voice and Sing # 841
- Healer of Our Every Ill # 612
- There Is a Balm in Gilead # 614

Let us pray: Gracious, All-Knowing God, free and restore us from the fever of sin, that we may accept your call to serve you in faithfulness, gratitude, and constancy in prayer. We ask this through Jesus, our Healer; and the Holy Spirit, our Comforter; who live and reigns with You as One God, now and beyond the ages of ages. **Amen.**

February 7, 2021