

**Sermon March 2, 2008 Healing, Wholeness and God Scripture Dramatic Reading “Peter and Jesus” from Bell, book, Reference made to 2 Kings 5: 1-14 Rev. Thomas L. Hall, Shadow Rock United Church of Christ, Phoenix, AZ # 5 Sermon**

Healing is one of the major heritages of the Christian church. Praying for and with each other is a sign of the covenant we have with each other and with our God. Scripture contains stories as we heard in this morning’s reading - the healing of Naaman. Scripture speaks of monarchs who are healed, prophets commissioned, sick healed and the dead raised. Scripture reassures us of God’s love and compassion. Jesus’ acts of healing all testify to the health, fullness and wholeness that God desires and works towards in different ways for all God’s people. In the early Christian church, particularly in James 5: 13-16, prayer, anointing, confession and forgiveness have a place in healing.

But healing isn’t just physical healing. The story of the Bible, while a love story in which we are the beloved is also a story in which God seeks to make whole, to mend, to reconnect God’s creation. Brian McLaren, in his book, “A New Kind of Christian” writes that “ the Latin roots of the word ‘religion’ means “reconnecting, like broken ligaments, severed connections, being reconnected and defragmented.” He continues that what we need, “being deligated, disconnected, fragmented people is to be religamented, reconnected, put back together with God, with one another, reintegrated within ourselves, reconnected to the world we are part of.” (Page 72) In essence it is being made whole.

Unfortunately so often we think of physical healing only. In the dialogue this morning between Peter and Jesus, so well presented by Mike and Cindy, we heard of the variety of physical healings. But there is also the need for healing of wounds caused by hurtful words, actions and attitudes of people towards us and others. The early Christians experienced scorn and ridicule because of who they were, their beliefs, and their actions. Would you want to be a community that pooled all of their resources in a negative way? There is today a great need for spiritual healing as well, of our memories of God, of the churches role in causing hurt and exclusion. We only need to recall the civil rights struggle, or women’s right to vote, or the Crusades of the Middle Ages, all in the name of religion.

So, yes, our Christian faith does have an important role to play in healing. God does come into play. I was glad to learn that Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA, is lifting up the environment as a major issue for the Evangelicals, and for this administration. God is concerned for the healing of the world too, and as such we, as stewards, need to pay attention to our actions and our attitudes, and to our consumption.

The church also has a role in institutional healing, within the church itself for it’s errors, sins, mistakes, and as I call them “sins of good intentions” where we, thinking we are doing the right thing, are in fact, doing just the opposite. The Apostle Paul is a perfect example of this: he thought he was doing “God’s will” by seeking out those who were Christians and bringing them to Jerusalem for trial. One day he encountered the risen Jesus and learned that his actions were not supportive of God’s. I have often been guilty of the sin of good intention and have to step back, and even ask for forgiveness.

All of this is to bring us to the understanding that all of us are like Naaman who we meet in the Hebrew scriptures 2 Kings 5: 1-14. We see in him a man who is stubborn, foolish, and full of pride. As desperate as Naaman was to have his leprosy cured, he is furious that Elisha, the prophet, does not show up in person. He’s more concerned about the perceived insult than about humbly following the instructions of Elisha’s messenger. Pride jeopardizes Naaman’s chance to

be healed. He thinks that he knows how he should be healed. His thinking is shallow and limited, for he cannot see that the Lord and that word is used, but refers to God, works through so many ways and people. God's ways are higher and more humane than our ways and the ways of nations and governments. Naaman saw that he needed to be cured. But the cure was only for one part of his wholeness. God saw more and was able to bring healing to the complete man.

It is God who did the healing. It is God whom the church in its ministries points to. The church today is being called to reclaim ministries of healing and reconciliation for institutions, society, nations, and the world. We can't go back, but we can realize that "the past can leave fingerprints on the future." (From CSI segment) We learn from the past, the past is approved, but it must be integrated, accepted so that wholeness and growth and the future can be appreciated. In an age of medical treatments limited by medical necessity, Christians are challenged to provide treatments that are spiritually essential. Rituals are ways in which we can do just that. One of these includes a service for healing and wholeness, of letting go. You may not have experienced one, but listen to one church's experience.

"Four times a year, about 200 members of National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., gather for a healing service. As the prayers begin, the Rev. Craig Barnes invites the people to come forward and speak with one of the pastors and an elder. Long lines form, and members take turns kneeling, sharing concerns, and receiving prayers for wholeness.

In Billings, MT as the interim, a church quite similar in membership demographics as Shadow Rock, in regards to education, age, economic and diversity, people participated in a service similar to the one we'll do here. People came forward for whatever was broken in their lives, or came on behalf of another, or lifted up the brokenness of society, minorities, the war, leaders. People lifted up to let go so that they could move ahead into the future with hope, trust, and a vision that they were not alone, that they were in this journey together.

In the words of one of my favorite songs "I will Change your Name" we are no longer called "wounded, outcast, lonely or afraid." Our new name is "confidence, joyfulness, overcoming one, faithfulness, friend of God, one who seeks my face."

Take a few moments during the quiet time of communion to write on a piece of paper those events, circumstances, people, whatever it is write it down. When you leave, there are fire pits outside the entrance, where you can put them and they will be burned, consumed.

As you come forward, for the sacrament of communion, hear God saying your new name, confidence, joyfulness, friend of God, in which the past does leave fingerprints on the future, but the "past is affirmed and the future is open." Take a moment as we prepare for communion in which we are affirmed, as a church moving into the unknown, the future, with trust, hope and love. Amen.